

PERSPECTIVE

DECEMBER 2017

**THE MOTIVATION AND
MISSION OF THE
DISCIPLE-MAKER**

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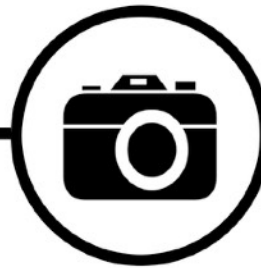


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The Motivation and Mission of the Disciple-Maker

Note: This article is adapted from a sermon preached on September 10, 2017.

Last week, I received an email invitation to an online conference for pastors. The sponsor led with this statement:

How to build a discipleship culture that grows your church. Our heart in this free conference is to provide practical talks from today's top leaders to help church leaders build thriving teams, cultivate inspiring workplaces, and transform their communities with the love of Jesus.

The advertisers clearly wanted my attention. They promised if I implement their practices, my church would grow and thrive. It's all about motivation.

Motivation matters. Just ask yourself if it's easier to get out of bed when you have a flight to catch. Of course it is! When the teacher says she'll flunk if you don't turn in your paper, you have a very good reason to get it done. When the doctor says you need exercise or your health is going to tank, you start running. That's motivation.

MISSION AND MOTIVATION

Disciple-makers need motivation too. If you want to be used by God to make disciples, you have to know what this entails. Yes, you need to know the mission God assigned you. But the mission shouldn't be separated from the motivation; they are intertwined. We must be clear about *what* a disciple-maker does, but the Bible is just as clear as to *why* we disciple.

By the end of this article, I pray you'll be motivated to make discipling a normal part of your life. This will happen if you realize your own need for discipling.

Think again about that invite I got for the conference. I want everything they offer: a *growing* church, a thriving team, an inspiring workplace, a community transformed by the love of Jesus. But more than a growing church, I want to know I'm a *part* of the church. More than a *thriving* team, I want to know I'm on the team. More than seeing a community *transformed* by the love of Jesus, I want to know I've been transformed by the love of Jesus—I want to know I'm in the community.

The reason I care so deeply about discipling, is because the stakes couldn't be higher. My ability to persevere in the faith depends ultimately on God, but he uses other believers. Discipling isn't a church growth plan. Our very salvation is at stake. In that sense, the genuineness of our faith is dependent upon us discipling one another.

If you are a Christian, you are an instrument God uses to keep other Christians from falling away from the faith. In order for us to persevere, to not give up, and to hear on the Day of Judgment, "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" we need other believers to personally, regularly, and deliberately help us grow in Christlikeness. Sin is real and powerful, and we need brothers and sisters to help us kill it. We call that disciple-making.

Are you motivated yet?

PAY ATTENTION

Hebrews 1 and 3 is a great place to unpack the mission and the motivation for disciple-making. One of the most important passages on discipling is found in Hebrews 3, but let's start in chapter 2.

Hebrews is a letter written to Jewish-background believers. They are tempted to give up on Christianity. They're about to fall away, and the author doesn't want them to do that. In verse 1, he writes, "*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*" He urges them to press ahead and to keep their eyes on Jesus. He wants them to "*pay much closer attention*" to what they heard. In other words, they are to pay closer attention to the gospel.

As a young driver, I'd often be on the road late at night, and I'd be so tired I'd nearly fall asleep. I had to fight to keep my eyes open. The stakes were high. Falling asleep at the wheel is dangerous. My life and the lives of the drivers around me were at stake. What did I need to do? I needed to "*pay much closer attention*" to the road.

The author of Hebrews has the same concern for his readers. He is pleading with them to "*pay much closer attention*" to the gospel. Drifting away would be spiritually deadly.

THE CROSS IS AT THE CENTER

It's easy to forget about the gospel. I know I'm tempted to leave the theology of my salvation behind, so I can focus on more practical matters like how to be a better husband, father, and friend. But the author of Hebrews

warns against Christians ever thinking they've finished Gospel 101.

Even as you read this article, you'll be tempted to skip over this section. I wouldn't do that if I were you. If disciple-making is about helping another believer personally, regularly, and deliberately grow in Christlikeness, we'd better have a firm grasp on what, exactly, Christ did. Hebrews 2 begins with a call to pay attention. It ends with a stiff reminder of cross-centered truth:

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

He begins with the incarnation. Jesus took on flesh. God became man; he took upon himself a human body—like yours and mine, a body that could die. And he did it, verse 14, so that “*through death [he could] destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.*”

On the cross, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil, the power of sin and death. He did it to deliver us—sinners like you and me. We have a Savior who can save us because he became one of us. He doesn't know what it is to sin, but in his humanity, he was tempted in every way.

Verse 17 has an unusual word: propitiation. To say that Christ is our propitiation is to communicate that Jesus bore the wrath of God, so we wouldn't have to. It's not merely that Christ forgave us—as wonderful as that truth may be! Christ died as a substitute for us.

This is what you believe if you are a Christian. You believe you deserve God's wrath: judgment and hell. But God, in his love, sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life and die the death every Christian deserves to die. Christ rose from the dead to prove he can deliver us. Put your faith in him. This is the gospel. The message the apostles preached in the first century is the message preached today. It's what you must believe in order to be a

Christian. But it's also something you need to remember and reflect upon if you are a Christian.

HOLDING FAST

The author of Hebrews knows it's not enough to simply reflect on the cross-work of Christ. Christianity isn't about rehearsing in your mind something that happened a long time ago. No, to be a Christian, you have to cling to this gospel as if your very life depended upon it because it does.

The author of Hebrews is writing to a group of struggling Christians. They were tempted to let go of the gospel. They want to reverse course. Following Christ, they are beginning to think, is just too hard.

Have you ever felt that way? Maybe you weren't sure if it was worth it. Christ demands your time and your money. But more than any of that, he demands your very heart. To be a Christian, you have to let go of things you once valued to pursue the life Christ values. This is never easy. It's always good, but it's difficult.

This is how these young believers felt, and the author of Hebrews screams at them to stop. Nothing is more dangerous than veering away from the gospel that saved you. In fact, you can only consider yourself a Christian if you hang on to Christ.

In Hebrews 3:6, he refers to the believers as a house. This is a common metaphor for the church—we are a house built by God. But, he says this is only true for them if they persevere in the faith: “*And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.*”

Who is our confidence? Who is our boasting? It is Christ himself.

At this point, you should be asking yourself, “How do I do this? What does it look like to hold fast?” That's the question you should be asking. But the author of Hebrews isn't yet ready to answer. First, he wants to drive home the danger of letting go of Jesus. In short, he's not done motivating you.

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS

He takes his readers back in time to a history lesson they would have recalled—the lives of the people of Israel in the wilderness. Long ago, in the days of Moses, the people heard God's voice. They saw his mighty hand at work. But they were too afraid to follow him. They

turned back, they refused to obey, and it cost them their lives.

This is such a famous part of Israel's history, and it's actually sung about in Psalm 95. The author of Hebrews quotes a portion of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:

⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,*

“Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,*

⁹ *where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.*

¹⁰ *Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.’*

¹¹ *As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”*

This was an ugly period in Israel's life. Moses led them out of Egypt (Exo. 15:1–21). God preserved them with water, manna, and quail (Exo. 15:22–16:36). He gave them his perfect Law (Exo. 20). God brought them to the edge of the Promised Land (Num. 13). Again and again, God proved himself reliable.

All the people had to do was trust him and walk in faith. They had to believe God and enter the Promised Land. It was their land of rest. But first, they had to enter and occupy it. But they were scared. They thought their enemies would kill them in the Promised Land. They didn't believe God would protect them. They refused to enter. They hardened their hearts. They rebelled against God (Num. 14).

What did God do? He sent them back into the wilderness. For forty years, they didn't enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:20–36). Verse 11, they did not enter God's rest.

The whole tragedy is summarized in verses 15–19.

¹⁵ *As it is said,*

*“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

¹⁶ *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?* ¹⁷ *And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?* ¹⁸ *And to whom*

did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

Those who heard God's command rebelled against it—verse 16. As a result, they never entered the Promised Land—verse 17. What was their problem? What did they do wrong? They disobeyed God—verse 18. But why did they disobey? Because they didn't trust God. They *“were unable to enter because of unbelief.”*

This isn't just a history lesson. We shouldn't be like them. That's the point of verse 7, *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”* “You” is us! He repeats the command in verse 15.

Do you see the danger? It's a danger we all face. It's tempting to doubt God. Regardless of how faithful he's been, when we are tempted or tested, we can push God to the side. We might question his goodness. We disobey his commands. In that sense, we, like them, can harden our hearts. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp wrote a good book called *How People Change*. They describe those who profess to be Christians, but their hearts are hardening:

There are people who know the Lord, but whose lives fail to produce the expected fruit of faith. Their lives are not characterized by peaceful, loving relationships, a sweet, natural, day-by-day worship of the Lord, a wholesome and balanced relationship to material things, and ongoing spiritual growth. Instead, these believers leave a trail of broken relationships, a knowledgeable but impersonal walk with God, a struggle with material things, and a definite lack of personal growth. Something is wrong with this harvest; it contradicts the faith that is supposed to be its source.¹

Does any of that resonate with you? None of us were with Moses when the people refused to enter the Promised Land. But we all know what it's like to rebel, to doubt God, and to live a life that contradicts our faith.

TOO GOOD TO FALL?

During the Great Recession, we learned about companies some said were “too big to fail.” They thought the government had to keep them from shutting down because their failure would be too devastating for the economy to take.

My fear is many Christians think they are “too good to fail.” In other words, we know the Bible, and we see the rebellion of the Jewish people. We also see examples of New Testament church members falling away from the faith (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor. 5; 1 Tim. 1:20), but we think to ourselves, “That could never be me.”

But are you sure? Yes, everyone who is truly saved will persevere (Rom. 8:29; 14:4; Phil. 1:6; Jude 1:24; 1 Pet. 1:3–5; John 10:28–29). But there are some with false faith (1 John 2:3–4; Eph. 5:5–6). That’s the problem the author of Hebrews is addressing. Those with false faith will not last. Every Christian is to be about the business of making sure he or she does not have this false faith.

This requires a good deal of self-examination. The author of Hebrews calls us to look at our own hearts in 3:12, “*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.*”

But, again, how do we do this? How do we “*take care*” of our own hearts to ensure our faith is not false? There are a lot of answers. We should remember the gospel, preach it to ourselves, study the Bible, pray, and the list goes on. But what answer does the author of Hebrews give here? His response might surprise you.

A SURPRISING ANSWER

The author of Hebrews has just told us about the Israelites whose faith crumbled under the leadership of Moses. They rebelled against Moses and God. He’s told us Jesus is better than Moses. The question is how can we take care to be sure we don’t have “*an evil, unbelieving heart.*” I’d expect him to answer this way: “Consider Jesus! He’s a better leader than Moses. Jesus can soften your heart. He can protect you. Put your faith in him. Remember the gospel. Follow Christ.” That’s what I’d expect to find in verse 13.

But that’s not what the answer we find. Instead, the author of Hebrews writes, “*But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” God uses other believers to protect our hearts.

Do you want protect yourself from false faith? Do you want to be sure you really are a Christian? You need someone in your life exhorting you. And you should be in the lives of other believers, exhorting them. You are an instrument God ordained to keep others from falling away from the faith.

Again, don’t get me wrong. I believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. I believe once saved, always saved. But you are the means of God to protect and preserve the faith of others. The Bible doesn’t just point us to Christ. The Bible tells us to point one another to Christ: “*Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” In other words, make disciples.

NOW TO THE MISSION

We’ve heard it a thousand times, “Don’t be a lone-ranger Christian.” But we can’t hear it enough. Most of us are tempted to isolation and self-reliance. We are tempted to think we can live the Christian life on our own—with limited interference from other believers. But that’s just not true. And it’s not like discipling is simply an added benefit of the Christian life—something you can take or not take. We are actually commanded to exhort other believers every day.

Does this motivate you to make disciples? I pray it does. And with that motivation in place, we can now turn our attention to the mission.

What are the essential ingredients of disciple-making? The answer is found in verse 13: “*Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*”

Discipling should be personal

In verse 13, we’re told we are to disciple “*one another.*” I’m helped by my own Bible-reading, by preaching, and by Christian books. All of this is valuable. But there’s nothing like another believer coming alongside me and urging me to keep on following Christ. There is no replacement for a Christian encouraging me to lean into my all-sufficient Savior, reminding me of Christ’s goodness, and pointing out evidence of God’s grace in my life. This kind of speech falls under the umbrella of the word “exhort.”

It doesn’t matter if you are an introvert or an extrovert. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been a Christian one day or eighty years. You need brothers and sisters who are willing and able to dig into your life and exhort you to grow in Christlikeness. Disciple-making needs to be personal.

A growing number of Christians in this generation are turning to their favorite podcasts for discipleship. This is not good. It’s not even enough to listen to sermons

preached at your church—though this is necessary. You need someone in your life actually getting to know you. You need discipling.

Discipling should be regular

Verse 13 says it ought to happen “every day.” This took place in the early church. Acts 2:46, “*And day by day, attending temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with gladness and generous hearts.*”

There should be a “day-by-dayness” to church community. There should be a constant rhythm of exhortation. There needs to be a regular, personal touch.

Life is so busy. How is this possible? A weekly coffee? A daily text? A five-minute conversation and prayer after or before a service? Driving together to Bible study? Sharing a meal?

All of the above. There is not one way to do it, but it must be done.

Remember what’s at stake: we need personal and regular exhortation to keep us from falling away from the living God. We need the ongoing words of brothers and sisters because our hearts are far too easily hardened.

Discipling should be deliberate

Notice why we exhort one another: “*that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*”

It’s not enough to meet up personally and regularly. Basketball teams do that. Reading clubs do that. We exhort one another with a definite purpose. We are to be deliberate because we want our words to be restorative and redemptive. Our aim is to use words to point others to the beauty and power of the cross of Christ. Our goal is to help each other grow in Christlikeness by showing people the life and work of Christ.

We have several examples of this kind of deliberate speech in the Bible. In Acts 16, Paul went to Philippi. He preached the gospel and saw a number of converts. He even performed a miracle. But the leaders didn’t like it. Paul and his companions were beaten and thrown in prison. But God protected Paul. And when Paul left the jail, he made a visit to some of these new Philippian believers—new Christians who must have been scared persecution was coming. What did Paul do?

In Acts 16:40, Luke tells us Paul and his companions “*went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they*

had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.” That word, “encouraged” is the same word for “exhort” in Hebrews 3:13. Paul exhorted them. What did Paul say? We don’t know for sure. But since he’d just left a beating and imprisonment, he probably reminded them it’s an honor to suffer for the name of Christ. He probably told them to live is Christ but to die is gain. Whatever he said, he was deliberate—he pointed them to the Savior, so they wouldn’t fall away.

We have another example of exhortation from Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12, “*For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*” There’s a sting to this word of exhortation. Paul challenged them to “*walk in a manner worthy of God.*” Some were tempted to walk in a manner unworthy of God. Paul exhorted them to holiness. He told them not to drift away. He encouraged them to walk like Christ.

“Exhort” is a comprehensive word. Sometimes it’s a word of comfort; sometimes it’s a word of challenge or rebuke. But whatever our exhortation looks like, it’s always redemptive, “*that none of [us] may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*”

Once you are convinced disciple-making is important (motivation), you are ready to commit yourself to personal, regular, and deliberate relationships (mission). It won’t be easy, but it’s worth it.

SEASONS OF “GOSPEL BLINDNESS”

Are you ready to make disciples? I hope so! As you invest in others, don’t expect to remain unchanged. I love how one author put it: “When you start spending individual time with another Christian for the purpose of having a ministry in his or her life—time together in the Word, prayer, fellowship, systematic training—something happens in your own life as well.”²

The process of pointing others to Christ has a way of pointing you to Christ. This is part of the joy and wonder of making disciples. You find yourself loving and serving Christ all the more. You can’t pour out your life to help others grow without seeing growth in your own life as well.

So that’s our mission—personally, regularly, and deliberately helping another believer grow in Christlikeness. This is what we all need because, like Israel, like the first readers of Hebrews, we can be

hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. That's our motivation. We are all subject to what Lane and Tripp call seasons of "gospel blindness":

It is in the here and now that many of us experience a gospel blindness. Our sight is dimmed by the tyranny of the urgent, by the siren call of success, by the seductive beauty of physical things, by our inability to admit our own problem, and by the casual relationships within the body of Christ that we mistakenly call fellowship.³

This is a danger for all of us. Life is busy. We get focused on our careers and on our children and on everything in between. We get lured away from Christ in so many different ways. We think because we're going to church everything is fine. But even in church, the "casual relationships" we find aren't enough to sustain us. It's not really fellowship. We need others to personally, regularly, and deliberately help us follow Christ. Discipling is what every Christian needs, so our hearts don't become hardened to the gospel.

~Aaron Menikoff

¹ Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change*, 3.

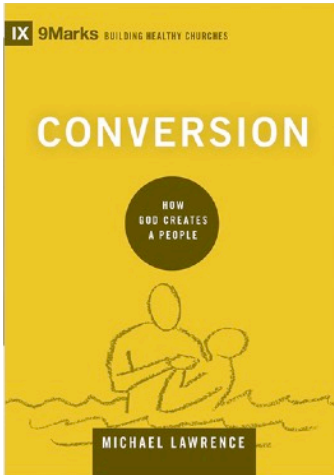
² Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple-Making*, 26.

³ *How People Change*, 4.

Conversion: How God Creates a People

Written by Michael Lawrence

Bookstall Price \$6



How a church practices membership, evangelism, discipleship, the ordinances, and even its children's ministry reveals a lot about what the church believes, including something as essential and foundational as to how someone becomes a Christian. In *Conversion: How God Creates a People*, Michael Lawrence carefully and biblically defines the doctrine of conversion and how it should affect the life and practices of local churches. The first half of the book clears up some common misunderstandings in what it means to become a Christian. The latter half

defines what repentance and faith ought to look like in a Christian's life and gives implications for evangelism, church membership, and assurance.

There are not many books I encourage the church to budget for so we can routinely give away, but this one has been added to the list. It's very accessible in terms of readability and size. But its real value is how it practically equips readers to understand the essence of and implications for a right understanding of conversion.

I've given copies to people who found themselves in two common situations. One was for a believer who is unsure if a close friend is saved. This friend's "conversion story" sounds more like they were persuaded to change political parties instead of submitting to King Jesus. This book helps the friend understand the nature of true repentance and faith.

The second person is encouraging a family member to be more discerning in picking churches. They are attending a "Bible believing" church, but its seeker-sensitive philosophy of ministry betrays its confessional belief. This book will explain why membership and discipleship are so closely connected to what it means to be a true Christian and what that practically looks like.

– RECOMMENDED BY BRAD THAYER

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Like an enlisted soldier who swore his allegiance when he signed the papers but renews that allegiance every time he salutes a passing officer, so it is with Christians. We signed in our baptism, and Romans 6 tells us to consider the meaning of our baptism daily: we are dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ."

–Holy, Not Healed, p. 75

2

"We must communicate honestly, which we do by telling people to count the cost [of following Jesus] ...When we don't ask people to count the cost, but instead market felt-need benefits, we set them up for failure when suffering and trials come. What happens to their faith in Christ when young mothers die, kids rebel, or job are lost?"

–Summon, Don't Sell, p. 93

3

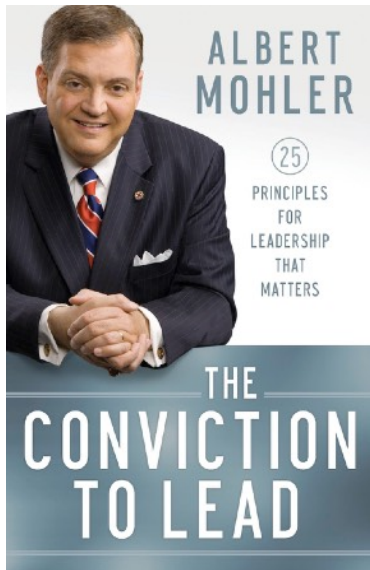
"Our theology of conversion matters, because it reorients our understanding of the purpose of our assembly and the meaning of our membership. If our churches aren't filled with believers, then God is robbed of the praise he desires and deserves."

–Conclusion, p. 124

The Conviction to Lead

Written by Albert Mohler

Bookstall Price \$18



Albert Mohler's book, *The Conviction to Lead*, intends to change the way readers think about leadership. The principles he outlines apply to any believer, whether they lead an organization, a Bible study, or a family. They serve as a guideline for the believer to live as Christ's disciple. Mohler states "we cannot lead in a way that is faithful to Christ and effective for Christ's people if we are not deeply invested in Christian truth." These truths allow the world to make sense, provide a blueprint for our understanding and drive us to action.

Dr. Mohler succinctly states that God's Word reveals one grand narrative throughout, the story of God's determination to glorify himself by saving sinners through the atoning death of his own Son. We are to be stewards of this story and so captivated by it that we become part of it. This story contains four major themes. The first them is *Creation*, God creates everything out of nothing by the power of his Word. Mankind alone is created in God's own image and given the ability to know him. The second theme, *The Fall*, records Adam and Eve defying God and suffering the result of God's judgment. Although retaining God's image, they now experience mortality, knowing death and every physical infirmity. All of nature experiences decay, wrath, pain and calamity. In the third theme, *Redemption*, God graciously has a plan to save humanity from his hopeless state. Promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament with the coming of Christ, God saves us by accepting Christ's death as full payment for the penalty of our sins. The fourth theme, *Consummation*, completes this story, whereby God brings everything into perfect harmony with the second coming of Christ.

Believers are encouraged to find their identity and meaning in this one story. It should form our thinking, our living, and our leading. In Mohler's words, "This is the story that tells us who we are, how we got here, and where we are going." This story also allows us to die, being assured that the story will survive us and that we continue to be part of it even after our death. The Christian leader is accountable to this story and it must shape the way followers think about what is real truth. We should lead others to embrace this same knowledge. This is the framework of the Christian leader.

– RECOMMENDED BY STEVE ARNOLD

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Convictional leadership begins with a commitment to truth and a relentless desire to see others know and believe the same truth."

–Leaders are Communicators1, p. 94

2

"The sovereignty of God puts us in our place, and that place is in God's service."

–Leadership as Stewardship, p. 135

3

"Your legacy is all that remains when you are gone. Do you have any idea what that legacy will be? Answering that question honestly is part of what it means to have the conviction to lead."

–The Leader's Legacy, p. 213

NEW MEMBERS



Jean Colley



Laura Countess



Pedro & Ana Gabriela
Guerra-Reyes



Chidiebere
Okoli



Collier Pressnell



Ann Sanford



Marshall & Kailee
Young



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH