JOSEPH: AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP FORGED IN THE CRUCIBLE

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Authentic leadership, a relatively new leadership theory, helps fill the need for principled and trustworthy leaders. Issues of integrity, values, and care for others are emphasized, aligning well with biblical foundations for Christian leaders. Of special note is the role of major life events or crucibles, referring to some transformative experience or hardship which tests a person’s limits, but also provides the means of personal growth, empathy, self-knowledge, and deeper reliance upon God. Joseph exemplified authentic leadership in practice and through years of life-changing hardship. Through his own values, self-control, compassion, and sense of purpose, he earned the trust of high officials, and even more importantly, he was found trustworthy by God, who was consistently blessed his leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

On December 5, 2018, Jon Meacham, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of George H. W. Bush, provided a eulogy at President G. H. W. Bush’s funeral (Foussianes, 2018, para. 1). He eloquently spoke of President Bush’s character: “His life code, as he said, was: ‘Tell the truth. Don’t blame people. Be strong. Do your best. Try hard. Forgive. Stay the course.’ And that was, and is, the most American of creeds” (Foussianes, 2018, para. 12).

Such life codes speak of integrity. They speak of those vital internal character qualities of trustworthy leaders. According to Meacham (2015), President Bush might justify political compromise during campaigns, but always aimed to be “principled and selfless once in command” (Meacham, 2015, p. xxv). Meacham continued, “And as
President of the United States, Bush was often both” (Meacham, 2015, p. xxv). President Bush’s personal principles were echoed in his prayer, penned by himself, and given at his 1989 inauguration, a prayer befitting any Christian leader’s mindset: “….For we are given power not to advance our own purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name. There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people” (Meacham, 2015, p. 552). For the Christian leader, these values of integrity, humble service, and perseverance are not optional; they reflect God’s plan for leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-12, 2 Tim. 2:15, 22-24, Acts 20:28-31, Mark 10:42-45, Josh. 1:5-7).

Still a relatively new theory, authentic leadership helps fill the need for such principled leaders (Northouse, 2016, p. 206). Issues of integrity, values, and care for others are emphasized: “Authentic leaders understand their own values, place followers’ needs above their own, and work with followers to align the interests in order to create a greater common good” (Northouse, 2016, pp. 206-207). These traits develop over a lifetime (Northouse, 2016, p. 196). Of special note is the factor of critical life events (Northouse, 2016, p. 205) or crucibles (Bennis & Thomas, 2002a, p.3). A crucible refers to a significant life-changing event or crisis which forces people to examine their own values and ultimately, emerge stronger, more confident in themselves and in their purpose (Bennis & Thomas, 2002a, p. 3). These events can be either positive or negative, simple or crisis-level, but serve as catalysts for change and growth (Northouse, 2016, p. 205).

President Bush’s life codes would apply to Joseph’s parallel role as a national leader. In the Genesis account, he told the truth. He didn’t blame people. He forgave. He stayed the course, even when it was long and difficult (Gen. 41:28, 45:8-9, 50:19-21). Through extreme and lengthy crises, he consistently honored God by his character. Through his trials, God “was with Joseph” (Gen. 39:2, New International Version). This article will explore how the behavior, character, and life events of Joseph exemplify authentic leadership and how authentic leadership informs today’s Christian leaders.

II. AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP THEORY

Self-Knowledge

A key characteristic of authentic leadership is self-knowledge (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 329). Authentic leaders are aware of their values and beliefs, and this deep understanding helps them stay true to themselves and also communicate their principles and ethics to others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, pp. 329-330). They strengthen organizations by helping its members “find meaning and connection at work through greater self-awareness; by restoring and building optimism, confidence and hope; by promoting transparent relationships and decision-making that builds trust and commitment among followers; and by fostering inclusive structures and positive ethical climates” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 331).

Model of Bill George

There are various perspectives on authentic leadership. This article will focus on the approach of Bill George, devised from his own experience in the corporate world.
and from interviews with over 125 successful leaders (Northouse, 2016, p. 197). In George’s (2003) practical approach to authentic leadership, he identifies five essential elements: values/behavior, self-discipline/consistency, relationships/connectedness, heart/compassion, and purpose/passion (p. 36). These qualities are not sequential; rather, they represent life-long developmental growth (George, 2003, p. 18).

**Values and Behavior.** Values and behavior refer to leaders’ innate sense of self: their character, what they value, and what they believe (George, 2003, p. 20). Value-driven leaders “have a clear idea of who they are, where they are going, and what the right thing is to do” (Northouse, 2016, pp. 198-199). According to Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009), authentic leadership encompasses internalized moral perspective, transparency within relationships, self-awareness, and balanced processing (p. 424). Deeply-held morality is a guiding force (George, 2003, p. 20).

**Self-Discipline and Consistency.** As important as values are, self-discipline is necessary in order to convert one’s core values into actual behavior (George, 2003, p. 24). Stress can impede sound judgment, but authentic leaders have learned to stay calm during times of pressure (George, 2003, p. 41).

**Relationships and Connectedness.** Authentic leaders are able to establish strong relationships (Northouse, 2016, p. 199). With a genuine tendency toward openness toward others, they share their own stories and take an interest in the stories of others. Through this exchange, bonds of trust and closeness are formed (2016, p. 199). Leaders build connection and commitment within their teams by their openness, even if the dialogue includes constructive feedback or bad news (George, 2003, pp. 40-41).

**Heart and Compassion.** With a heart of compassion, authentic leaders intentionally care for others (Northouse, 2016, p. 200). They open themselves to people’s personal lives and problems and, in turn, team members are inspired to believe in their leader (George, 2003, pp. 39-40).

**Purpose and Passion.** Lastly, those who hold a passionate purpose not only know their mission, but are inspired and driven by it (George, 2003, p. 19). Their work deeply matters to them (George, 2003, p. 19). They may grow and learn while working toward someone else’s purpose for a time, but ultimately an authentic leader must discover and commit to her own purpose (George, 2003, p. 19).

### III. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CRUCIBLE EVENTS

George (2003) describes the metaphorical crucible as some transformative life event which tests one’s limits but also reveals the self-knowledge about how the person has inwardly changed and grown from the difficulty (p. 27). In the Middle Ages, crucibles – heat-proof vessels used for high-temperature chemical reactions – were used to by alchemists attempting to turn metals into gold (Thomas, 2009, p. 21). Used for leadership contexts, a crucible describes a “transformative experience from which a person extracts his or her ‘gold’: a new or an altered sense of identity” (Thomas, 2009, p. 21). Unlike typical life events which may be stressful but predictable, crucibles incite one to find meaning; they are “more like trials or tests that corner individuals and force them to answer questions about who they are and what is really important to them” (Thomas, 2009, p. 21). Crucible events serve to validate the authentic leader’s values through stress-testing:
It is relatively easy to list your values and to live by them when things are going well. When your success, your career, or even your life hangs in the balance, you learn what is most important, what you are prepared to sacrifice, and what trade-offs you are willing to make (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007, p. 134).

The term *crucible*, as used in authentic leadership theory, originated from a study conducted by Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas, and the resultant book, Geeks and Geezers (2002). They intended to explore the influence of eras on leaders using two age groups (people over seventy and people under thirty-five), but the study produced something unexpected (Bennis & Thomas, 2002b). From their findings, they developed a theory to explain how some people can find meaning through times of testing and “emerge, not just stronger, but equipped with the tools he or she needs both to lead and to learn” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002b, p. 4). Their model explains how people find meaning in their difficulties “and how that process of ‘meaning-making’ both galvanizes individuals and gives them their distinctive voice” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002b, p. 3).

**Three Types of Crucible Events**

From his work studying nearly 200 *crucible*-level experiences, Thomas (2009) has categorized them into three types (p. 21). The *New Territory* category refers to situations in which a person experiences an unexpected turn of events, such as a new position at work or a major change within the family (Thomas, 2009). One must overcome the disorientation and confusion, but gains a new alertness and sense-making skills (Thomas, 2009, pp. 21-22). The *Reversal* category describes a disruptive loss of some kind (Thomas, 2009, p. 24). Something that was assumed to be permanent is suddenly lost, or something assumed to be true is revealed as false (Thomas, 2009). A reversal can provide a leader with new and broader understanding of a situation (Thomas, 2009, p. 24). The *Suspension* category involves a hiatus, sometimes unplanned, in which some set of routine behaviors are removed, possibly by force, and replaced by a heavily structured routine, such as the military or prison, or with no routine (Thomas, 2009, p. 25). Such leaders need to refocus their purpose and strengthen their personal set of beliefs and values (Thomas, 2009, p. 25). All three types involve “a kind of potential energy, that demanded a behavior or maybe an answer that either did not exist previously or went unrecognized” (Thomas, 2009, p. 26).

**The Crucibles of George H. W. Bush**

*Incident as a WWII Navy Pilot.* Lending credibility to the *crucible* element of authentic leadership theory are two particular critical life events of President Bush, noted to have impacted him as a leader (Meacham, 2015, pp. 89-95, 147-150). The first occurred during WWII while Bush served as a Navy pilot (Meacham, 2015). In the early morning of September 2, 1944, at the young age of twenty, this young pilot, accompanied by two soldiers, took off on a mission to bomb a radio tower on the Japanese island of Chichi-Jima (Meacham, 2015, p. 89). With the target in view, his plane was hit by enemy fire (Meacham, 2015). As the plane immediately filled with
smoke, Bush maintained control of the plane long enough to hit the target, then parachuted to the water below (Meacham, 2015). As a Japanese boat began its approach toward him, Bush, stranded in a tiny raft with no oars, could not help fearing for his life or at least being taken as a prisoner of war. (Meacham, 2015). That threat was removed by a nearby U.S. fighter plane, and, after two hours of waiting, Bush was rescued, but not without the painful realization that his two fellow servicemen had not survived (Meacham, 2015). During those hours, “he sat in the raft in tears” (Meacham, 2015, p. 93).

Bush later reminisced of the event, explaining its impact: “It was transforming. Transforming in the sense that you realize how close death can be. You realize, painstakingly so, the responsibility you had for the life of somebody else” (Meacham, 2015, p. 95). He pondered, “I’ll always wonder, ‘Why me? Why was I spared?'” (Meacham, 2015, p. 105). According to Meacham (2015), Bush “spent the rest of his life striving to prove that he was worthy of being saved when others were doomed” (p. 105).

Family Loss. President Bush endured an even deeper life-altering event, evident from his own answer to a journalist during the 1980 presidential campaign (Bush, 2014, p. 57). Probing to see if Mr. Bush could relate to average people, the journalist asked him if he had ever lived through a “personal difficulty” (Bush, 2014, p. 57). Staring at the reporter, Bush asked, “Have you ever sat and watched your child die?” (Bush, 2014, p. 57). To the journalist’s answer in the negative, Bush replied, “I did, for six months” (Bush, 2014, p. 57). Just before she turned four years old, the Bush’s daughter Robin died of leukemia (Meacham, 2015). Mrs. Bush recollected on this difficult time: “We awakened night after night in great physical pain – it hurt that much” (Meacham, 2015, p. 148).

Influence of Crucibles on Leadership. For President Bush, the search for meaning in that loss continued throughout his life (Meacham, 2015). He expressed one particular realization: “It taught me that life is unpredictable and fragile” (Meacham, 2015, p. 150). Visiting Poland during his years as vice president, and thirty-five years after Robin’s death, Bush visited a hospital ward for children with leukemia. Upon meeting one young boy, sick with the same disease which stole his daughter, Bush felt a wave of empathy (Meacham, 2015). Not wanting to be seen crying in front of the many television cameras, he quietly focused on the child: “So I stood there looking at this little guy, tears running down my cheek, but able to talk to him pleasantly... hoping he didn’t see but, if he did, hoping he’d feel that I loved him” (Meacham, 2015, p. xxix). Empathy gained from heartache is evident.

The WWII experience at Chichi-Jima also proved to be instrumental in Bush’s later leadership responsibilities (Meacham, 2015, p. 422). In 1981, while serving as the U.S. vice president, Bush faced unexpected pressure after President Reagan was shot, yet Bush was observed to appear surprisingly calm (Meacham, 2015). Meacham observed, “In a way, Bush had been here before. Long ago he had been charged with life-and-death responsibilities on an airborne mission” (Meacham, 2015, p.422). Meacham (2015) records that Bush’s experience near Japan as a twenty-year-old gave him strength to lead now as a middle-aged statesman: “Now, amid uncertainty and doubt, he was determined to do his duty, which, as he saw it, was to lead quietly and with dignity” (p. 422).
The Crucibles of Joseph

**Family Betrayal.** In the Bible, Joseph experienced multiple *crucible* experiences which spanned thirteen years (Gen. 37:2, 41:41). While still just a teenager (Gen. 37:2), his brothers mistreated him terribly; they even considered murder when the opportunity arose (Gen. 37:20). Instead, they threw Joseph in an empty well and then sold him to traders bound for the foreign land of Egypt (Gen. 37:24, 28). Besides the psychological trauma of being helpless and physically trapped in a dark, confining well, he also endured the emotional anguish of family betrayal; after the brothers forced him into the well, they callously sat down to enjoy a meal together (Gen. 37:25). The depth of pain Joseph suffered is revealed in the brothers’ confession years later: “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen” (Gen. 42:21).

**Mistreatment in Egypt.** No longer enjoying the status as his father’s favored son, Joseph lived as a slave in Egypt, serving in the home of Potiphar, Pharaoh’s captain of the guard (Gen. 37:36). There, he suffered further demoralization after being falsely accused of sexual misconduct by his master’s wife (Gen. 39:14-18), when in fact, he resisted her advancements out of respect for God and her husband (39:8-10). For this, he was imprisoned (Gen. 39:20). During that time, he cared for two fellow prisoners, Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker (Gen. 40:2-4). After interpreting their troublesome dreams, Joseph pleaded for the cupbearer’s help:

> But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon (Gen. 40:14-15).

Joseph’s *crucible* continued, however, and he was forgotten for two more years (Gen. 40:23).

According to C. S. Lewis (1952), pride is “the essential vice of mankind, the utmost evil” (p. 121). Lewis continues: “Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind” (Lewis, 1952, p. 122). If pride is the “anti-God” mindset as Lewis asserts, Joseph’s state of mind reveals the opposite. More than his other admirable character traits, Joseph’s humility is deeply connected to his close and reverent relationship with God. From his earliest days in Egypt, it is recorded that “the Lord was with Joseph” (Gen. 39:2) and brought him success in everything (Gen. 39:2-3, 21-23). In the midst of trials and unjust treatment, God consistently elevated Joseph to leadership positions, yet at every opportunity, Joseph humbly credited God when he could have taken credit himself (Gen. 40:8, 41:16, 50:19).

**Character Growth through Hardship.** Joseph’s admirable character traits, however, developed over time through endurance cultivated by hardship (Rom. 5:3-4). Such endurance gained through suffering can be likened to physical endurance gained through painful exercise (Cloud & Townsend, 2001, p. 206). Muscles are strained past their natural ability, explains Henry Cloud (2001): “After my workout they recreate and...
rejuvenate and grow back to a higher level of development than before. I tear down to rebuild. And through the process of pain, growth happens” (Cloud & Townsend, 2001, pp. 206-207). Toward the same end, God often “stretches our souls” (Cloud & Townsend, 2001, p. 207). Suffering “can take us to places where one more season of ‘comfort’ cannot” (Cloud & Townsend, 2001, p. 206). In the Joseph account, rising to power so abruptly and in such a drastic reversal could ruin a young leader, but for Joseph, “his sufferings nurtured a meek spirit” (Howell, 2003, p. 24).

In the biblical epic of Joseph, he is introduced as an immature tattle-tale, blatantly favored by his father, and the source of his brothers’ envy (Gen. 37:2-11). Throughout the thirteen years of brokenness, however, Joseph’s suffering strengthened his ability to humbly depend on God (Gen. 40:8, 41:16, 28), to practice self-control (Gen. 39:9), and to treat others compassionately (Gen. 40:7, 45:4-15). Of particular significance was Joseph’s reverent acknowledgement of God’s specific purpose in his life:

...because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance (Gen. 45:5b-7).

IV. JOSEPH’S EXAMPLE OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

In the Genesis account, God repeatedly elevated Joseph as a leader by helping him earn the trust of high government officials: Potiphar (Gen. 39:4), the prison warden (Gen. 39:22-23), and Pharaoh (Gen. 41:39-44). He also earned the trust of the people (Gen. 47:25). In his leadership, Joseph consistently honored God by his character. Throughout these roles, Joseph exemplified all five traits of George’s (2003) model of authentic leadership: values and behavior, self-discipline and consistency, relationships through connectedness, heart of compassion, and passionate purpose (p. 36).

Values and Behavior

One aspect of Joseph’s integrity often overlooked is his honesty. George (2003) asserts, “Integrity is the one value that is required in every authentic leader. Integrity not just the absence of lying, but telling the whole truth, as painful as it may be” (p. 20). Joseph spoke honestly even when the news was bad. In prison, Joseph revealed the positive fate of the cupbearer and sadly, the imminent death of the baker (Gen. 40:8). To both men, Joseph straightforwardly began his interpretation with the phrase, “This is what it means” (Gen. 40:12, 18). Acting on God’s behalf (40:8), Joseph stated the truth to these two men in a direct manner.

After two years, the need for painful truth arose again. Joseph was summoned to interpret another set of dreams, this time for Pharaoh himself. Since the Pharaoh was considered a god himself (Walton, 2001, p. 674), Joseph’s honesty put him at risk as he claimed emphatically that the interpretation would come from God: “Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do” (Gen. 41:25). Emphasizing this fact, Joseph repeated it at the
close of the interpretation: “It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do” (Gen. 41:28). Joseph’s character trait of honesty exalted God even at Joseph’s own risk.

Value-guided behavior marked Joseph’s business practices. He had authority to control the entire supply of grain for Egypt and all outlying areas (Gen. 41:54) as well as access to a vast treasury: “Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain…and he brought it to Pharaoh’s palace” (Gen. 47:14). Though he could have secretly yielded to the temptation of extortion, the biblical account indicates he acted with integrity.

Lastly, Joseph exemplified integrity by honoring his word given to his father concerning his request to be buried in Canaan. Jacob asked for Joseph’s “faithfulness” in this (Gen. 47:29) and Joseph answered, “I will do as you say” (Gen. 47:30). Jacob could rest in Joseph’s promise, and “worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff” (Gen. 47:31). Joseph buried Jacob as requested, keeping his word (Gen. 50:6-7).

Self-Discipline and Consistency

While in Egypt, Joseph had opportunity to relinquish self-control in at least four areas: sexual sin, revenge, self-advancement, and extortion. In each area of temptation, he refused to yield.

Opportunity for Sexual Sin. Potiphar’s wife took notice of young, handsome Joseph (Gen. 39:6-7) and made sexual advances toward him. Her direct and brazen demands continued “day after day” (39:10). In that situation, most people would have been caught off guard by such boldness but not Joseph. Swindoll (1998) notes, “Without hesitation and being absolutely secure in himself and his God, he responded with equal boldness” (p. 27). Twice in the passage, it is recorded, “Joseph refused” (Gen 39:8, 10). He refused her demands and refused “even to be with her” (39:10).

George (2003) asserts that the strength gained from enduring a crucible can provide the discipline for success later in life (p. 27). The opposite holds true as well: “Without the wisdom of the crucible, [untested people] cannot cope and are prone to do bizarre things on their way to self-destruction” (George, 2003, p. 29). Joseph’s testing strengthened his self-discipline and, unlike his brother Judah with Tamar (Gen 38:15-18), enabled him to withstand strong temptation and stay true to God.

Opportunity for Revenge. In a total reversal of prior events, Joseph became the “governor of the land” (Gen. 42:6) and his brothers were vulnerable before him. They needed food, and they had been living in bondage to their guilt (Gen. 42:21-22, 28). After more than twenty years, Joseph encountered his brothers (Gen. 42:7). At this point, Joseph displayed self-disciplined emotions. Seeing his brothers, fierce memories and emotions would have naturally arisen internally with no advantage of forewarning. During these interactions, he held power to retaliate. At their second arrival, they even feared, “He wants to attack us and overpower us seize us as slaves” (Gen. 43:18). Yet, Joseph’s self-control stabilized him.

Two mistakes were possible. He could have taken quick, reactionary revenge, overstepping God’s place of judgment. He also could have unwisely rushed to reveal himself before knowing if their hearts had changed. Joseph did neither. Instead he tested them while retaining his anonymity. It was not until the brothers had proved
themselves as repentant that Joseph “could no longer control himself before all his attendants” (Gen. 45:1). His intense emotional display at his revelation was a natural, human response of love and relief.

By this time, Joseph had already faced prior opportunities for revenge. After being freed from prison and appointed second-in-command (Gen. 41:40), Joseph could have summoned the cupbearer who had so easily forgotten him, costing him two more full years of undeserved imprisonment (Gen. 40:14, 23, 41:1). He could have also invoked revenge on Potiphar and his wife. Instead, Joseph allowed these past crucibles to strengthen his character as well as to soften his heart.

As opposed to living a life of bitterness born of his mistreatment, Joseph chose gratitude to God, evident in the names chosen for his sons born to him in Egypt (Schaeffer, 1974, p. 100). Joseph named his first son Manasseh, possibly from a Hebrew root meaning “to forget” (NIV note): “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household’” (Gen. 41:51). Joseph named his second son Ephraim, which sounds like the Hebrew for “twice fruitful” (NIV note). Joseph explained, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering” (Gen. 41:52). With these names, Joseph expressed thankfulness to God for his goodness, for removing the sting of pain from his memory, and replacing it with daily reminders, in the names of his boys, of God’s active work in his life (Swindoll, 1998, p. 82). Though in a position of authority and power, Joseph took no revenge. Instead, he acknowledged God’s reality in all of life. Even when surrounded by injustice and others’ wickedness, he gave God glory (Schaeffer, 1974, p. 100).

Opportunity for Self-Advancement. Pharaoh had a need for a dream interpreter and Joseph, still imprisoned, had the ability to fill this need (Gen. 41:8-14). At their initial meeting, Joseph’s first recorded response was, “I cannot do it” (Gen. 41:16). Only after that admission did he affirm that God would provide the interpretation. He pointed Pharaoh to the living God for the answer to his problem. Joseph’s character traits of humility and honesty worked together in this moment as Joseph’s interpretation “was at one and the same time a refutation of Pharaoh and his worldview and an undeniable confirmation of the truth of Joseph’s” (Arnold, 1998, p. 153). Egyptian kings were considered divine, with power to meet people’s needs (Arnold, 1998, p. 153). Joseph countered this belief, showing Pharaoh that God alone had that power and he cared enough to give Pharaoh forewarning before he took action (Arnold, 1998, p. 153).

After issuing the prophetic bad news, Joseph recommended that Pharaoh find a “discerning and wise man” (Gen. 41:33) to handle the impending food shortage. At no point did Joseph say, “I’d like the job. I’ve interpreted your dreams; I deserve the position” (Swindoll, 1998, p. 64). Instead, he showed restraint: “Refusing to manipulate the moment or drop hints, he simply stood there and waited. Somehow in the loneliness of his recent years, abandoned and forgotten in prison, he had learned to let the Lord have his way, in his time, for his purposes” (Swindoll, 1998, p. 65).

Opportunity for Extortion. In one day, Joseph experienced a drastic rise to power. After being a slave or prisoner for thirteen years, he was put “in charge of the whole land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:41), was dressed in fine clothes and jewelry, and was paraded throughout the streets in a chariot while people deferentially proclaimed, “Make way” (Gen. 41:42-43). Of particular significance was the signet ring which Pharaoh removed
from his own finger and placed on Joseph’s (Gen. 41:42). This ring was “the platinum charge card of the day” (Swindoll, 1998, p. 66). Yet with access to all of Egypt’s food supply and finances, he proved himself a disciplined leader, focused on transcendent aims of caring for others rather than on temporal monetary gain for himself (Gen. 41:47-49). Again, suffering can be credited with the development of Joseph’s self-control, this time with handling large-scale monetary resources: “Suffering provides an opportunity to develop a long-term perspective that is not rooted in our temporal surroundings. Through this change in perspective, we are able to endure that which is unpleasant or painful at the time” (Kisling, 2008, p. 144).

Relationships through Connectedness, and Heart of Compassion

During his imprisonment, Joseph’s sense of compassion and connectedness was evident in his interactions with the king’s cupbearer and baker, imprisoned like himself, and assigned to his supervision (Gen. 40:1-15). After their disturbing dreams, Joseph sensitively noticed the cupbearer and baker, and “saw that they were dejected” (Gen 40:6). These two men, along with Joseph, had previously held important positions but were now in prison. The author uses repetition to emphasize this fact: “each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison...” (Gen. 40:5) and again, “So [Joseph] asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him...” (Gen. 40:6). Looking dejected would not be so out of the ordinary considering these factors. Joseph was empathetic enough to discern that something was different about them that morning. As a caring leader, connected to those under his care, he did not ignore the issue, but asked them, “Why are your faces so sad today?” (Gen. 40:7).

Another scene depicting Joseph’s compassion and connection as a leader is that of his steward’s kind words and behavior toward Joseph’s brothers (Gen. 43:16-25). On their second journey to Egypt, Joseph’s brothers were terrified as they were escorted to Joseph’s home by the house steward (Gen. 43:16-18). They fearfully assumed, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys” (Gen. 43:18).

Even in Joseph’s absence, and despite Egyptians’ low view of Hebrews (Gen. 43:32), the steward spoke to the brothers with kindness and comfort in their time of distress: “‘It’s all right,’ he said, ‘Don’t be afraid’” (Gen. 43:23). The steward provided them with refreshing water to wash their feet (Gen. 43:24). The brothers had feared slavery as well as losing their donkeys, but the steward even cared for their animals: he “provided fodder for their donkeys” (Gen. 43:24). For these acts of kindness, there is no indication that they were the result of Joseph’s orders. Rather, it appears that Joseph’s subordinates had learned grace and compassion from him. Not only did this steward obey Joseph’s orders, but he treated these undeserving (and Hebrew) men graciously even in Joseph’s absence.

A third example of Joseph’s compassion concerned the forgiveness granted his brothers (Gen. 45:1-24). With clear evidence that his brothers’ hearts had changed, Joseph revealed his identity (Gen. 45:3). His brothers were naturally shocked and terrified (Gen. 45:3). Love, however, ruled the moment. Joseph called them tenderly,
“Come close to me” (Gen. 45:4). The reader can almost hear his voice soften. Acknowledging their feelings, he immediately tried to put their minds at ease: “Don’t be distressed…. Don’t be angry with yourselves” (Gen. 45:5). Three times he repeated the fact that “God sent me” (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8). Twice repeated was his explanation that God sent him ahead of them “to save lives” (Gen. 45:5), and then, narrowing the focus to his brothers, “to save your lives” (Gen. 45:7). Joseph compassionately released his brothers from all guilt. A wall of hostility, over twenty years old, dissolved and connection was made. They wept, kissed, and “afterward, his brothers talked with him” (Gen. 45:15), probably the first sincere conversation they ever enjoyed.

Passionate Purpose

Joseph’s clear and passionate purpose is discovered through the story’s climactic point. Joseph reveals the truth to his brothers, specifically replacing their actions with God’s: “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt…. [tell my father] this is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt” (Gen. 45:8-9, emphasis added). Howell (2003) believes Joseph’s resiliency, his willingness to forgive, and his faithfulness in stewardship stemmed from “his profound belief in a God who was working through him to accomplish the deliverance of the chosen family” (p. 26).

V. AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Authentic leaders are driven by noble motivations: they want to serve people, they are more concerned about empowering others than in power or personal status, and they are moved by compassion as much as by skill or knowledge (George, 2003, p. 12). Integrity is valued (George, 2003, p. 20). Foundational to George’s (2003) model is the concept of being true to who one was created to be (p. 12). The authentic leader does not bend to pressure from others even if it means standing alone (George, 2003, p. 12).

Since these motivations – serving, empowering, caring, doing what is right, and standing firm – align with biblical instruction for leaders, authentic leadership theory can be used to enhance Christian leadership. Jesus taught his leadership trainees to humbly serve others (John 13:14-15). According to Paul, gifts of spiritual leadership are given “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). Jesus’ prayerful call for Christian leaders was motivated by compassion: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Paul exhorted Christian workers to stand firm: “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).
Values and Behavior in Christian Leadership

Integrity is mandatory for authentic leadership (George, 2003, p. 20). Authentic leaders are guided by the “true north” (George, 2003, p. 20) of their moral compass, giving them a strong sense of right and wrong (p. 20). For the Christian leader, integrity is the ongoing result of the Holy Spirit’s work of transformation (Rom. 12:2).

Honesty is a prime component of integrity. More than a moral virtue, honesty is deeply spiritual. God cannot lie (Num. 23:19). Jesus is “the Truth” (John 14:6), while Satan is deemed the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Honesty is a mark of those belonging to the body of Christ, reflected in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, “Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (Eph. 4:25). To the Corinthian church, Paul wrote of the pursuit of truth and the rejection of falsehood: “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2).

In a study covering six time periods between 1987 and 2017, researchers Kouzes and Posner (2017) found that the character trait most desired in leaders from willing followers was honesty. This trait topped all others by a large margin: a range of 83 - 89% compared to only 58 – 69% for the next highest quality (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 30). The study showed that people desired to know for certain that the person they follow was worthy of their trust; a person’s own reputation is at risk when following someone untrustworthy (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 32).

Mirroring the biblical importance given to integrity and honesty, DeVries’ (2018) model of “TNT” leadership (“Three Nightmare Traits”) indicated that leader dishonesty stood as the first of these dangerous traits. Dishonesty was found to encourage “unethical organizational culture with low trust, low satisfaction, and high turnover” (DeVries, 2018, p. 4). In contrast, honesty was the focus of Joseph’s testing of his brothers for signs of contrition and repentance. Five times the phrase “honest men” is used, emphasizing the importance of this trait in evaluating character (Gen. 42:11, 19, 31, 33-34).

In ministry and work settings, embellishing the truth or leaving out certain details in communication can have disastrous results. Trust is lost. According to Blackaby and Blackaby (2011), “When people see their leaders stretching the truth, they lose confidence in them. Followers cannot expect their leaders to be perfect, but they want them to be honest” (p. 164). Even when leaders have great and worthwhile ideas, dishonesty will hinder the loyalty of their followers needed to carry it through (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011, p. 165). Similarly, leaders must practice care when making promises lest it become impossible to keep them (Lawson, 2009, p. 40). In contrast, “when a leader is always honest, followers quickly learn to trust and respect the leader” (Lawson, 2009, p. 40).

Self-discipline and Consistency in Christian Leadership

In his pastoral epistle to Titus, Paul emphasized self-control as criteria for leadership: “He must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable,
one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (Titus 1:7-8). Paul continues, his words resembling Joseph’s own choice to say “No” when encountering opportunities for sin: “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11-12). The Holy Spirit holds the key to the human battle for self-control:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (Gal. 5:16-17).

George (2003) notes that stress is a deterrent to self-control: “To be authentic, leaders must behave with consistency and self-discipline, not letting stress get in the way of their judgment” (p. 41). This insight aligns with Jesus’ own example of making rest and retreat a priority, for himself and for his team (Luke 5:16, Mark 6:31).

Relational Connectedness and Compassion in Christian Leadership

Joseph compassionately took notice of his fellow prisoners’ sadness, and rather than ignoring it, he acted (Gen. 40:6-8). Connection was made. According to Cloud (2013) regarding team leadership, “The first requirement to build trust is to connect through understanding the other person. People do not trust us when we understand them. They trust us when they understand that we understand them” (p. 173).

In all groups of people, including Christian teams, disagreements, conflicts, and even anger are unavoidable. Authentic leadership calls for compassion and mutual trust gained through open, intimate connections (George, 2003, p. 39). Authentic leaders share their life experiences as opposed to shutting themselves off from others. Such compassionate connections help people believe in and follow leaders (George, 2003, p. 40). Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians is pertinent: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32).

Forgiveness was a prominent theme in Joseph’s story. His son Manasseh was named to reflect God’s role in helping Joseph relinquish heartache over his family: “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household” (Gen. 41:51). His sons’ births were a point of celebration for God’s blessing and the ability to relinquish the pain and betrayal he suffered (Howell, 2003, p. 24). Joseph offered unconditional forgiveness to his brothers while also refusing to be victimized by past mistreatment (Howell, 2003, pp. 24-25).

Passionate Purpose and Christian Leadership

Finding purpose, according to George (2003), stems from understanding one’s own passions and motivations (p. 19). George asserts that the most essential quality of a leader is to “be your own person, authentic in every regard” (p. 12). Effective leaders
maintain their autonomy and are not easily swayed to the whims of others regardless of outside pressure (p. 12). They stay true to their own purpose: “There is no way you can adopt someone else’s purpose and still be an authentic leader… The purpose for your leadership must be uniquely yours” (p. 19). George cautions that leadership experts tend to focus on characteristics to be emulated, a trend which results in only a persona of a leader, the actual opposite of authentic leadership (p. 11).

Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (2017) encourage leaders to self-reflect about their own passions and “deepest feelings” (p. 104) and then clearly communicate them (p. 104). This inspires others to join them in the process, to “walk alongside their leaders… to dream with them, invent with them, and be involved in creating their futures” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 107). People want to work for more than money; they want purpose (Kouzes and Posner, 2017). Similar emphasis is urged by Hartwig and Bird (2015) who assert that all efforts put forth by a team hinge on purpose (p. 116). Purpose is “the invisible leader of exceptional teams” (Hartwig & Bird, 2015, p. 116).

Though a general undertone for conformity can exist in Christian ministry circles, Christian leaders can be authentic; they can be themselves. A passionate purpose – for Christian leaders, worldwide Kingdom-building (Matt 28:18-20) – serves as the focusing agent. From their research on authentic leadership and ministerial effectiveness, Puls, Ludden, and Freemyer (2014) find that “when leaders and followers enthusiastically and trustingly gather around one organization’s cause or mission, exciting ministry opportunities abound” (p. 66).

Value of Crucibles for Christian Leaders

For leaders, hardship provides powerful lessons “about adapting and growing, about discovering new ways to engage or enroll others in a shared pursuit, and about recognizing the right thing to do and summoning the courage to do it” (Thomas, 2009, p. 22). The lessons from hardship and suffering are evident in Scripture. Paul was a leader who understood the transforming power of suffering:

But we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Rom. 5:3-5).

Understanding of Personal Identity. Rather than a skill to be learned, authenticity comes about through God’s own means to transform a leader’s heart through experiences of life, including hardship:

God works in our lives to mold and strengthen us, to prepare us to be his leaders. [Some experiences] are excruciatingly painful… He orchestrates our experiences as challenges to mold our heart, to jar us out of our comfort zones, to shake up our complacency, to make us look inward, deep into our heart, until some crisis shows who we have become (Seidel, 2008, p. 180).
In crucible-type experiences, one’s limits are tested (George, 2003). It is in such
times of testing, however, that people often discover a deep purpose, including who
they are and who they want to become: “Having survived, you will know that indeed you
can take on any challenge and come out of it a better person for the experience
(George, 2003, p. 27). It is through difficult experiences that a Christian leader learns to
depend on Christ, including the need to develop one’s own sense of secure authentic

Compassion through an Understanding of Limitations. In their research on
lessons of experience for the Center for Creative Leadership, Moxley and Pulley (2003)
found, to their surprise, that participating leaders named hardship as the most
significant factor to their leadership development (p. 14). Hardships provided “lessons
Through hardship, leaders learn that they have limits (Moxley & Pulley, 2003, p. 15). As
leaders come to recognize their own limitation in controlling events, they also
compassionately understand the limited control others hold (Moxley & Pulley, 2003, p.
15).

For the Christian leader, the realization of limitation can draw her to God and his
sufficiency. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians concerning this same connection:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles
we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far
beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we
had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on
ourselves but on God, who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

The corporate context of Paul's message provides a fitting model for Christian
leadership teams. Paul and Timothy (2 Cor. 1:1) experienced this crucible together: “we
despaired of life itself” (2 Cor. 1:8, italics added). In the troubles of their ministry work
however, they found connection with each other and together, they learned to depend
on God: "But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God" (2 Cor.
1:9).

Balanced Family Life. From their research, Moxley and Pulley (2003) assert that
hardship helps move people toward an improved balance between work and family (p.
15). Facing a difficult trial tends to clarify what actually matters thereby helping to set
priorities (Moxley & Pulley, 2003, p. 15). This focus aligns with Paul’s admonition to
Timothy regarding the Christian leader’s imperative to maintain a healthy, balanced
family life (1 Tim. 3:2-5, 12).

Refusal of Victimization. When one encounters a crucible of life or leadership,
something “far beyond our ability to endure” (2 Cor. 1:8), the Christian leader can allow
the situation to deepen his faith and his self-understanding, and strengthen his
character. A key factor is the refusal of victimization (Thomas, 2009, p. 24). Leaders find
meaning, strength, and purpose in adversity where non-leaders will feel powerless and
victimized (Thomas, 2009, p. 24). A Christian leader himself who dealt with tragedy,
could have easily become bitter, depressed, and even lost my faith. In times of personal
crisis, the grace of God and the power of faith can provide the basis for healing” (p. 32).
VI. CONCLUSION

Authentic leadership offers a framework of elements beneficial to Christian leaders. These elements include values, compassion, relationships, self-discipline, and purpose (George, 2003, p. 36). Above all is integrity, the basis of trust (George, 2003, p. 20). These elements align well with biblical mandates for leaders such as the pursuit of righteousness, love, self-control, and God’s purpose of making disciples. Of special prominence in authentic leadership theory are crucibles, life-transforming events, usually of extreme difficulty, which test a person’s limits but can be the means of character formation, new insights about oneself, and for the Christian, a deeper relationship with God. The account of Joseph well illustrates a picture of an authentic leader. Joseph was a leader committed to God and a life of integrity, but one who also allowed crucible events to mold him into an exemplary leader God used greatly.

For the Christian leader, authentic leadership provides Christian leaders license for self-discovery and self-expression. Rather than simply adopt the latest ministry trend, the authentic Christian leader is more apt to creatively and prayerfully formulate his own methods and personal objectives, as befitting his own context.

The freedom of authenticity, however, is bounded by the biblical call to righteousness and self-control. Holding to the emphasis on values and behavior, the authentic Christian leader has “renounced secret and shameful ways” (2 Cor. 4:2a) and has committed his personal and professional life to “everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2b).

Authentic leadership’s emphasis on compassion and connectedness helps the Christian leader balance ministerial authority with love: “Authority without compassion leads to harsh authoritarianism. Compassion without authority leads to social chaos” (Laniak, 2006, p. 247). Jesus’ leadership example portrays a mutual relationship of love and connection between a leader and followers. Jesus cared for disciples and also looked to them for his own emotional support (Mark 6:31-32, Matt. 26:37-38).

Lastly, authentic leadership offers wisdom and encouragement for life’s unexpected crucible events. Those heart-wrenching experiences can be viewed through models such as Joseph’s. Self-control is strengthened. Compassion and empathy are deepened. Human limitations are humbly understood and forgiveness is more easily offered. Finally, a commitment to God during difficult circumstances can open one’s spiritual eyes to His otherwise unseen purpose, just as Joseph realized: “…but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20).
About the Author

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VII. REFERENCES


