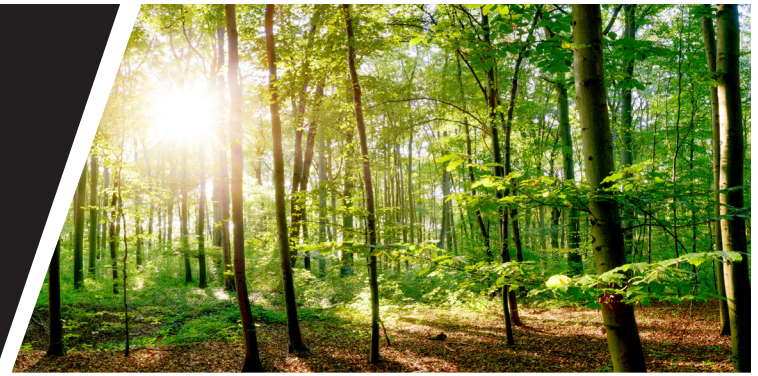


MELTING THE ICEBERGS

Uncovering Six Key Areas that can Sink Your Leadership

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We often hear of high-profile Christian leaders whose ministries have crumbled. But what doesn't make national (or even local) news reports are the struggles of ordinary spiritual leaders:

- The exhausted small-group leader who burns out and refuses to take on a similar position again
- The children's ministry director who runs an effective program but leaves a trail of hurt and angry volunteers in her wake
- The stalwart couple who mentors young marrieds—until their own divorce leaves everyone wondering, "How could that have happened?"

The People Resources Team of The Navigators, DJ's parent organization, has counseled and advised many such dedicated leaders. Over the years, they've seen that traditional training produces leaders with good skills and disciplines. However, heart issues are often left unaddressed. It's assumed that biblical knowledge, leadership know-how, regular time with God, and right living will somehow filter down and affect a person's deeper struggles and underlying deficits – and sometimes that does happen. But too often those unseen hurts remain untouched. Like the bult of an iceberg hiding below the waterline, what is hidden can disrupt a leader's ministry.

The Navigator's team has identified six of these key "below the line" issues that, if left unattended, cause leaders to fail or burn out. As we describe the issues and several symptoms of each, consider whether God might be nudging you to pay attention to one of these below-the-surface areas (we've provided questions at the end to help). If so, take heart. Bringing the issue into the light is the first step toward experiencing God's work of redemption in that facet of your life – and He can redeem.

1. INNER HEALING

Listening to God about the areas of emotional woundedness so hurts of the past can be healed and we can be set free in the present.

Increasingly, Christians are crippled by woundedness and dysfunction – and leaders are no exception. Our most damaging wounding takes place in childhood. We may be actively hurt (through emotional, verbal, physical or sexual abuse) or passively wounded (through emotional neglect, or parental absence, passivity, or a lack of loving affirmation). Wounding can also result from misinterpreting a completely neutral circumstance – children are great observers of events bus poor interpreters of them.

Our responses to such hurts place us in bondage. These unconscious inner reactions could be lies we believe, self-protective strategies we adopt, or unbiblical vows we make. Lies are usually linked to our identity, our view of God, and how we perceive life. Strategies are ways we avoid more hurt, such as performing to gain acceptance. Vows are inner determinations (often unconscious), such as, I'll never be vulnerable, I'll never feel, or I'm not going to be like my mom and dad.

When leaders haven't dealt with past wounds, their ministry is filtered through those areas of weakness; they often end up harming people within their ministries.

SYMPTOMS

Have you ever considered how your past wounding might affect your current life? If not, these symptoms can serve as a "heads up."

- People or circumstances trigger disproportionate responses or overreactions in you.
- You lead from the head and from your skills and knowledge – your heart is untapped.
- You wear a false front with people, and you become very weary of keeping up that façade.

- The same complaints about your relational or leadership style follow you from setting to setting.
- You lack freedom in relationships. You're always protecting yourself from others.
- Your identity is closely tied to your ministry. Loss of your ministry role or failure in it is devastating.
- You're teaching truths to others – particularly about God's love and grace – but not experiencing them.
- You're desperate to overcome certain behaviors or sins, but no amount of Scripture, prayer, or willpower works.

2. RECONCILED RELATIONSHIPS

Being able to help others (and yourself) replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship.

Inner healing deals with our long-term issues; this area is about resolving issues in our present relationships. These conflicts and hurts may stem from past wounding, but they often result from sinfulness, an inability to allow for people's differences, or from misunderstanding that are allowed to fester.

The strain can be between you and someone in your ministry, between you and someone in your ministry, between and someone unrelated to your ministry (a coworker or your spouse, for example), or between people within your ministry.

If these relationships are left unreconciled, the results might be tangible – open hostility, ongoing gossip or sniping, or a generally tense atmosphere. But the effects are often intangible and fail to show up in measurable ways: Tolerating hurt, disagreement, and anger may block the flow of God's grace into our ministries. These broken relationships will also give Satan the freedom to interfere and perhaps even develop strongholds (see 2 COR. 2:10-11, EPH. 4:26-27, 2 TIM. 2:24-26).

SYMPTOMS

The following symptoms may be present when relationships are in need of reconciliation.

- You or others constantly rehearse past injuries and talk of real or imagined ill-treatment.
- You're surrounded by conflict – it seems to follow you.
- You or others might assign traits to someone outside the broken relationship. For example, if a small-group leader is bitter at a friend, she may make unwarranted assumptions about the actions and motives of a woman in her small group who reminds her of that friend.
- You or others harbor an unforgiving attitude, which eventually leads to bitterness that spreads and damages others.
- Others may detect and comment on hurt in your countenance and voice, even though you deny it.
- You react or "twitch" when you encounter a certain person or people. You're always aware of those people and try to avoid them.
- You find yourself forming alliances to bend others to your position.
- Disunity is a major factor in your ministry area.

3. LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Freedom from hidden addictions and behaviors, particularly sexual.

In response to our wounds, we often turn to a behavior or action that lets us release our tension or numb our pain. The possibilities are numerous: explosive anger, gambling, drivenness, over- (or under) eating, and substance abuse – just to name a few. But we often turn to a sexual behavior.

Though these hidden behaviors may start as a result of wounding, they soon take on lives of their own. The actions grip us and we can't stop ourselves from turning to them again and again – even when the original cause is dealt with. These struggles are made worse by the shame and hiding they engender.

If we don't bring these hidden behaviors and sins into the light, they will derail our leadership. When we do bring these behaviors to the light and address them with the help of God and others, it kills the shame associated with them and brings the chance for forgiveness, healing, and redemption.

SYMPTOMS

Leaders often minimize the seriousness of a hidden sin. Therefore, we've listed not only symptoms of this hiddenness, but also its consequences. Noting the consequences you experience may help emphasize how weighty these behaviors are.

- You may experience a loss of God's power in your ministry (though God is gracious and often continues to work in spite of our sin).
- You stay on the surface with others because you are blocked and hiding.
- You are separated from intimacy with God – and with your spouse.
- You hide and lie. A lot of energy goes into protecting your secret. You have to keep running faster and faster to cover up your addiction.
- You live with a double standard in this hidden area. You know the behavior is wrong but you also find a way to say, "It's OK for me to do this."
- You become resigned to the struggle and "know" nothing can be done.
- You stay busy and fend off any suggestion that something is wrong.
- You can't give broken people hope because what you have to offer comes from your lack of maturity and from pretense.
- Because you're living out of shame, you can't help others know who they are and believe that how God created them is good and valuable.
- You create an atmosphere that isn't emotionally or spiritually safe for those around you.

4. REST AND MARGIN

Regularly stopping activity and allowing for recharging so that you live with space between your load and human limits.

We shouldn't see rest as a luxury; it is so important to God that His intended lifestyle for His people includes times of "no regular work." In fact, God exalts rest as an act of worship and stewardship (Lev. 23:26-32). God meant us to live in a rhythm that includes periods of productivity and periods of restoration and refreshment. Not to live with margin means you're denying your God-given design to get regular rest.

When leaders don't have rest and margin, they become unavailable to God's interruptions. They are too busy for relationships, and they often neglect their own spiritual growth.

SYMPTOMS


Our culture tempts us to wear busyness as a badge of honor, but the results can be devastating. Here are some signs that you need more margin.

- You feel guilty if you're not producing.
- You find yourself sacrificing, avoiding, or ignoring progress in relational, social, spiritual, and emotional areas of your life.
- You resent your calling or your ministry.
- You have physical symptoms such as stomach problems, muscle tension, and insomnia.
- You're experiencing spiritual dryness.
- After a stressful period of ministry, you don't give yourself permission to stop, disengage, and recover.
- You put so much importance on what you do that you feel no one can take your place.
- You can't remember the last time you had fun.
- You put up a polite (or impolite) wall with people because you just don't have the time to deal with them or their problems.
- What you do has become more significant than who you are.
- You're beginning to think you can't last much longer in your responsibilities.

5. STEWARDSHIP OF DESIGN

Living and ministering in ways that are consistent with your God-given design and desires.

When we are younger, we need opportunities to extend ourselves into new areas and tap unknown



potential. But as we gain experience – and as our situations allow – we must learn to live more consistently within our God-given design.

Leaders sometimes protest when they hear this, viewing the exploration of their personal design as self-centered. And we do want to be available to serve God wherever we're called. But we do also need to be certain those areas of service are God's desire for us and not other people's.

Over the long-term ministering with no thought to gifting can leave leaders discouraged, disillusioned, and resentful. We might try to conform to other's expectations and become like them. At the same time, we won't celebrate how others are different from us or defer to those differences. We'll expect the people we lead and work with to be just like us – a recipe for continual conflict.

SYMPTOMS

You may never have considered that the following frustrations and conflicts with your ministry area could be traced to being in a role that doesn't match how you were designed.

- You are only vaguely aware of your God-given design and potential contributions. If you draw on your strengths, it is almost by accident.
- You wonder why others in your ministry role (such as teaching) seem to do it so easily while you struggle regularly.
- You don't consider your gifting when deciding among ministry options.
- You try to put yourself and others into a mold. You view innate differences among people as wrong or as competition.
- In life areas where you can make choices, there is very little agreement between your God-given design and your activities.
- You don't feel free to be who you really are or focus on what you do well.
- You sense key areas of gifting aren't being used in ministry.
- You've lost yourself in the identity of an organization or ministry; you don't know who you are without that setting.
- Because you don't understand your unique design, you also aren't aware of your limitations. You are all things to all people and haven't developed partnerships that let others do well in the areas in which you're weak.

6. COMMUNITY

Doing life with others in an environment where you are fully known and accepted.

God created us in His image, and, like Him, we were designed to live in community. We need a group of people who relate intimately with us, communicate with us on a deep level, and participate in our lives.

The Bible uses collective pronouns to describe the Christian life because our spiritual journey is not intended to be a private matter (it's personal, but not private). Apart from others we can never fully understand, appreciate, or become who we were created to be.

When leaders are missing those connections, their spiritual growth is stunted. They live in isolation that lets weaknesses grow. In fact, the damage from many of the areas we've mentioned flourishes when a leader exists in isolation.

SYMPTOMS

Sometimes the myriad relationships that come with leading others can make the reality that you aren't experiencing community. Consider these symptoms.

- You feel isolated.
- No one knows you well.
- You don't have a small group of people with whom you feel free to be who you really are.
- You don't have people close to you who affirm your strengths.
- You don't have people who help protect you in your areas of weakness.
- No one is helping to guard your soul. You feel very vulnerable in your sinfulness and woundedness.

- You spend your time taking care of others but no one is doing the same for you.
- You would find it difficult to name your close friends if someone asked you who they were.
- When you need help, you don't have anyone to call and rely on.
- People respect you but wouldn't call you their friend.
- No one is doing the "one anothers" of Scripture for you, such as loving you deeply from the heart or bearing your burdens.

LIGHT LIVING

Reading a collection of descriptions like that can be daunting! You may think, I need work in all these areas – now. But that's not likely God's heart toward you.

Each of these "below the line" areas address issues that were a long time in the making. So please don't feel that you must – or can – take on and conquer everything you've read about. Though God may give you the grace to do that, He'll often want you to relate with Him and others during a gradual process of redemption that melts away these hidden crags.

Think of this as an opportunity to take a first step toward new life. It's risky to talk with God and others about such difficult areas. But the joy of experiencing freedom for your life – and ministry – is waiting for you on the other side.

To begin, you might simply let what you've read percolate in you as God nudges you toward one area. When you're ready to go deeper, the following questions can help.

- Did a particular area resonate with you, where something inside you whispered, This one is really important, pay attention to it?
- How do you feel this area is affecting your spiritual leadership?
- What do you already know you should be doing in this area? Or what have you tried that hasn't worked?
- That list of "should do's" can be difficult to write, because the steps on it usually feel like a recipe for defeat – after all, if they were simple, you'd likely already be doing them. Beside each item on your list, note why it's hard – or even impossible – for you.

Getting a clear-eyed look like this can be discouraging, but take heart:

- As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. Ps. 103:13-14

As the Father's dearly loved child, you're free to lean into His care and perspective. These prayer prompts can help you begin that conversation.

- "Father, here is the area that resonated with me as I read through this list: _____. Is this something You'd like me to pay attention to in this season?"
- "Here is how I see this area might be affecting my spiritual leadership: _____. God, how do You see this area affecting my leadership?"
- Tell God how you feel about this area. "Father, when I start to consider this area of my life, I feel _____ (Hopeful? Overwhelmed? Despairing? Ashamed? Resigned?)." Invite God to share His feelings toward you and direct you toward scripture that shows His heart to you.
- Ask God to give you a first step. You've already listed things you know how to do, but be open to Him giving you creative and life-bringing ideas that might not have been your first instinct. Also, remember that God often works in us through others. You might pray, "Father, I feel like I know what to do, but those steps seem almost impossible. Would You direct me to the step You have in mind? Or help me see a creative alternative I can't see?"

The Father's heart is to bring freedom and wisdom to His sons and daughters. While it can take courage to face those often-hidden areas of our hearts, God will meet us in these places. He who begun a good work in us will continue it!