



*Overflow: a ministry training cohort under the ministry of Remain.*

In the ministry of Remain our aim is to come alongside people facing hard seasons. We want to help people process and persevere through those days - but before all that, to prepare for them. Since mid 2021 we have focused on areas of marriage, sickness, suffering, sorrow and struggles in the Christian faith - but one area we have not really addressed till now, one area that I feel quite convicted about especially these days - is the area of Christian ministry. Ministry is far from easy, far from ordinary, and yet far from lifeless or boring. We cannot assume that preparation will come accidentally or surprisingly. We cannot assume that ministry leaders will be just fine. We cannot assume that their own spiritual life can be neglected even for a moment.

Here and there I read about a pastor who “fell” in some kind of sin and a church that was deeply hurt. In the Fall of 2023, I read a few more stories. Things came to the surface leaving a local church in conflict and anger. In some cases there is discipline (temporarily or the person is fired), in other cases there is repentance and resignation. Either way, the harm is already done. When such disheartening news comes to the surface - you have to wonder how long things have they been brewing below the surface. *How far back does this go? When did things start going off course?* I wonder if and how these issues were neglected, sins were tolerated, accountability was overlooked. *How did we get here?* And now - the community of those churches are in disbelief, anger, hurt and confusion. *Why does this keep happening?*

### ***With before for***

Almost instantly - the LORD put this on my heart. I sensed a particular calling to put this small group together. So I prayerfully started reading and reflecting and writing. Started reading ministry books and rereading some from the past. I started imagining what it might look like to gather ministry leaders for ongoing conversations and training and accountability all in the area of godly character. I firmly believe that life *with* God should be the foundation and the fuel to ministry *for* God. *With, before for.*

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More than a name, platform, prestige, recognition, and praise - what a ministry leader should strive for the most - is a consistent godly character. What the church needs from him is his personal holiness. His heart before his ministry. His own spiritual health,

before that of others. We need to consider the ruin of sin, the unraveling of a marriage, ministry burn out, or genuine spiritual exhaustion miles and miles away from the edge of the cliff - and instead, to start taking steps in the right direction.

In a book entitled *Trellis and the Vine*, I read the following: *Disciple-makers need to be trained and equipped in conviction, character and competence. If this disciple-making vision is correct, then an integral part of making disciples is teaching and training every disciple to make other disciples. This training is not simply the imparting of certain skills or techniques. It involves nurturing and teaching people in their understanding and knowledge (their convictions), in their godliness and way of life (their character) and in their abilities and practical experiences of ministering to others (their competence). This sort of training is more like parenthood than the classroom. Its relational and personal, and involves modeling and imitation. For most congregations and ministries, thinking about training in this way will require a number of significant 'mind shifts' about ministry - from running programs and events to focusing on and training people; from using people to growing people; from maintaining structures to training new disciple-makers. (Marshall and Payne, 154)*

In other words, character is quite important and training cannot be neglected. Paul Tripp has a lot to say on this as well. In his book entitled *Lead*, he has an entire chapter on character. See what he says about where the problem is coming from. Read this with a diagnostic lens to consider if and how this is happening in your setting as well.

*This shift happens again and again—what a group of leaders confess that they value is no longer what they actually value. What they say is most important, they don't treat as most important. What they confess that they want in every leader, they don't actually want in every leader. They are no longer the same community of leaders with the values they once had, but no one seems to know it, and no one is sounding the warning alarms, and no one seems to understand that the leaders' work has taken on a very different character and that the leaders are in danger. A leadership community is spiritually safe and prepared for a long-term and productive life of ministry only when what is important to God is not just theologically important to them but also functionally important.*

Later he offers some reflections on what an ambassador is from II Corinthians 5. He says - *Church and ministry leadership is designed by God to be representative in every way that the word ambassador connotes. Leaders can't think of themselves first as ambassadors of the church or ministry they lead or as ambassadors of a particular strategic plan or as ambassadors of personal ministry career goals. They must lead with the knowledge that the thing God values most in a leader is that he or she represents him well. In every task, in every relationship, in public or in private, we are called to an ambassadorial mentality, to ambassadorial values, and to ambassadorial functioning.*

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### **Warning**

Have we quit being ambassadors for Christ? Tripp says...

*Power-hungry leaders have quit being ambassadors. Controlling, bullying leaders are no longer ambassadors. Sexist leaders who do not respect the God-given gifts of women and who may even relate to them inappropriately have forsaken their ambassadorial calling. Esteeming bigness and greatness over humility and godliness means you have functionally walked away from your ambassadorial commission. Using God-given gifts and positions in ways that are selfish, materialistic, or self aggrandizing is a forsaking of your ambassadorial position. Institutional advancement that compromises the gospel is a forsaking of ambassadorial calling. Leading by manipulation or intimidation is not the lifestyle of an ambassador. Failing to be patient, self-sacrificing, tender, loving, forgiving, humble, serving, gentle, faithful, and kind is a failure to lead as an ambassador of the Savior King who sent you.*

Are you concerned? Are you troubled by all this? Is the Spirit convicting you with any of this? In his book entitled, *From Weakness to Strength*, Pastor Scott Sauls says the following:

*“In America, credentials qualify a person to lead. In Jesus, the chief qualification is character. In America, what matters most are the results we produce. In Jesus, what matters most is the kind of people we are becoming. In America, success is measured by material accumulation, power and the positions that we hold. In Jesus, success is measured by material generosity, humility and the people whom we serve... In America, leaders make a name for themselves to become famous and sometimes treat Jesus as a means to that end. In Jesus, leaders make his name famous and treat their own positions, abilities and influence as a means to that end.”*

**In Jesus, leaders make his name famous and treat their own positions, abilities and influence as**

## **Aim**

This season of Overflow is all about the inner life of the leader. Our readings, lessons, testimonies, discussions, applications and prayers - will all be regarding the godly character of the leaders. *What should strike every leader about this list of leader qualities, the thing that jumps off the page, is that above everything else you could want in a leader, God values character. I must say*

*that I am not sure that we always do. I think there are times when we are more attracted to big personality, powerful communicating, and result- producing leaders than to persons of beautiful character. There’s another thing that impresses me here: the list tells us that in God’s eyes,*

*character trumps performance. There is only one mention in the entire list of qualities that you could call a “performance gift”— teaching. Everything else in the list is about what moves, motivates, and directs the heart of the leader. Everything else is about what a leader values most in life and in ministry. Leaders who have character, lead with character, model what is truly important, and encourage the same in others... Every character quality on this list is a window into what God values most in the heart and life of those he has called to lead. (Paul Tripp, *Lead*, chapter 5)*

**...in God’s eyes, character trumps performance**

What if we spend time together in the coming months for encouragement and accountability? What if we read and reflect on wisdom from authors and pastors? What if we take time to consider the wisdom from Scripture in regards to the heart and spiritual life of the leader?

What if we serve out of an overflow?