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## **How Leader Self-Differentiation Impacts the Level of Empowerment in Missional Teams and Communities**

### **Introduction**

In response to an observation that the Indo-European word *leith*, for leader, means “to go forth, to die,” Peter Steinke poses the question, “Is it foolish to ask, ‘How can I lead and stay alive?’”<sup>1</sup> Heifetz and Linsky similarly muse, “To lead is to live dangerously.”<sup>2</sup> While Steinke’s humorous yet sobering question reveals the extreme of the potential pitfalls of leadership, it also assumes as reality the age-old tension naturally inherent in the dynamics between those who have power and those who do not, between the leader and the follower. These tensions continue to be evident today and frequently present challenges to churches and ministries as well to the ministry teams entrusted with leading them.

The challenges of ministry leadership are numerous amidst the complex dynamics between leaders and followers, but the greatest challenge for the leader in his or her efforts to maximize progress towards the larger vision may very well be related to their own personal maturity in relationships. Leadership does not occur in a vacuum. Where there are organizational or ministry leaders attempting to lead or who have been entrusted to lead, there are *others* that complete the relational backdrop of a team or chain of command. The leader’s effectiveness will largely be based on their ability to lead these *others* towards effective and meaningful service towards their unifying purpose or vision.

A leader’s level of emotional maturity has one of the greatest influences upon their ability to create the healthy and empowering environments needed to lead well. In fact, emotionally mature leaders will be able to sustain these kind of healthy relationships and team environments that are fruitful in ministry, while emotionally immature leaders will tend to produce unhealthy team environments as a result of embroiling themselves in cycles of emotional reactivity with or in response to those that they are entrusted to lead

### **Emotional Maturity and Intentions**

Most leaders in my experience recognize that their success is connected in large part to those that they lead and their team’s collective health and productivity. They often have read the latest leadership books and have good and sincere intentions towards the people that are under their trust. The good intentions are there, yet progress towards the vision often gets derailed as a result of team or interpersonal conflict or low morale. Progress can also be hindered by the loss

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times : Being Calm and Courageous no Matter what* (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2006), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, "The Work of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* 79, no. 11 (12 2001): 131-141. 65.

of highly valuable laborers, who rather than leaving “for” something else have chosen to flee “from” a situation that they perceive is harmful to their personal well-being.

These all too common realities reflect the sobering truth that despite good intentions, leaders cannot escape the fruit of their own character when it comes to executing the roles and responsibilities of a leader. Steinke agrees as he writes, “The way in which the leader functions arises out of who the leader is. The leader's *being* and *functioning* are twin to each other.”<sup>3</sup> The character ingredient often missing from leaders who are failing to produce health and effectiveness in ministry is emotional maturity.

### **Emotional Maturity and Differentiation**

Mark McCloskey, professor of transformational leadership at Bethel Seminary, identifies five critical factors that determine one's level of emotional maturity: (1) recognition and regulation, (2) resilience, (3) realism, (4) responsibility, and (5) resonance and relational connection.<sup>4</sup> First, an emotionally mature person has the capacity to connect honestly with his or her own emotional climate and exercise self-control over that climate in the context of relationships (recognition and regulation). Second, an emotionally mature person has a strong capacity for hope and sustaining motivation and drive amidst struggle and challenge (resilience). Third, he or she has a strong capacity to embrace the reality about themselves and about the external world or circumstances with honesty and humility (realism). Fourth, the emotionally mature person is able to assume responsibility for their own feelings, attitudes, actions, as the impact of their decisions (responsibility). Finally, the emotionally mature person has the capacity to stay connected with others in a meaningful way over the course of the ups and downs of work and relationships (resonance and relational connection).

All of these capacities reflect a central concept integral in family systems theory and made popular by theorists and practitioners such as Murray Bowen and Edwin Friedman. They describe this concept as *self-differentiation*. Leroy T. Howe writes,

“Theologically construed, the capacity for self-differentiation is the capacity to be the persons God intends us to be, sharing with all human beings a common destiny to care for the earth on our creator's behalf...human beings are created with both the capacity and the calling to differentiate themselves as distinctive individuals even as they remain connected and contributory to the larger family which is humankind itself.”<sup>5</sup>

Self-differentiation and the larger notion of emotional maturity have as their basis the capacity to stay separate, but stay connected relationally. Parker Palmer describes this capacity as being

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<sup>3</sup> Steinke, xi.

<sup>4</sup> Mark McCloskey, "The Components of Emotional Maturity," *ML736 Course Documents – Emotional Maturity and Spiritual Leadership*, Bethel Seminary, 2007, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Leroy T. Howe, "Self-Differentiation in Christian Perspective," *Pastoral Psychology* 46, no. 5 (05 1998): 347-362. 348.

able to embrace the “profoundly opposite truths that my sense of self is deeply dependent on others dancing with me and that I still have a self when no one wants to dance.”<sup>6</sup>

Emotional maturity is a broader concept than self-differentiation, but at the same time it is very much dependent on one’s level of differentiation. Many of McCloskey’s components of emotional maturity or even what Daniel Goleman identifies as “emotional intelligence” is anchored in a person’s ability to have a healthy sense of their own limitations as well as the limitations of others. Can one really regulate one’s own emotional landscape or empathize freely with the plights of others when there is emotional confusion about where one’s significance and identity is anchored? Self-differentiation is a vital ingredient of identity that fuels one’s capacity for self-control and internal harmony as well as the capacity to relate to others well without confusing the dynamic with unresolved personal identity issues.

### **Leader Self-Differentiation and Challenge**

If one’s sense of personal security is not resolved, they are going to be more vulnerable to being blown about by the storms of leadership and personal anxiety. Leaders have an immense challenge before them as their level of self-differentiation is challenged at every turn. Leaders are the “go to” people when team members have needs they want to have met, want change, have feedback, or disagree. Even if team members demonstrate great maturity in bringing these items to the leader, the leader who is insecure or poorly differentiated can still be overwhelmed with anxiety because poor self-differentiation opens one self up to confusion about what defines them and what does not. These leaders grow anxious because such feedback ends up having a disproportionate amount of power in their lives, serving as a catalyst for the destructive belief that their identity is connected directly to what people think or feel about them. Leaders caught in this emotional dynamic often swing to the extremes of either allowing themselves to be completely defined by the feedback as they lose sight of themselves or they completely disregard the input or the messengers themselves so that they can preserve their own sense of identity.

Emotionally immature leaders, especially young leaders, can have a difficult time discerning the difference between healthy community feedback that serves the greater good and the toxic pushback that flows from others’ lack of emotional immaturity. McCloskey writes that, “The leadership challenge is to distinguish between the two, and appropriately handle the constructive dissent.”<sup>7</sup> Younger leaders who lack a secure sense of self can cave into the demands of toxic demands out of an effort to prove one’s self or preserve one’s status as the leader. Undifferentiated leaders may not always give into toxic demands, but again they often swing to the other extreme of guarding against all challenges or feedback. These leaders tend to get emotionally lost amidst feedback, pushback, and frustration. They then tend to throw the proverbial “baby out with the bathwater” as they are not secure enough to identify important feedback when it comes. Emotionally mature leaders are able to look beyond their own anxiety to sift out toxicity and learn as much as they can from those that have worthwhile contributions

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<sup>6</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach : Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 72.

<sup>7</sup> McCloskey, Mark. "Emotional Maturity and Leadership Effectiveness," *ML736DE Emotional Maturity and Spiritual Leader Course Notes*, Bethel Seminary, 2007. 4-5.

to make to the greater good. Maybe even more importantly, emotionally mature and self-differentiated leaders have the capacity to stay in relationship with those messengers of feedback or push back, because they possess the personal security and the humility to continue to move towards relationship without the anxiety of losing their own sense of self in the process.

*Anxiety* is a key concept in modern family systems theory and it represents the general or specific angst that people carry around in response to change, differences, or an encounter with things or situations outside of their control. Anxiety is a mark of poor self-differentiation when we understand the concept in the context of relationships or relational systems. Anxiety reflects the condition of a person who needs factors in relationships external to them to change in order to be restored to a sense of personal security. From a leadership perspective, emotional fusion and emotional cutoff are two extremes of how individuals can respond out of their own anxiety if they are unable to preserve their sense of self in the face of the relational demands around them. In the context of leadership, both reactions are deadly to any hope of creating healthy environments that are empowering other leaders to action for the sake of the mission.

Emotional fusion in this context occurs when a leader's anxiety about being separate is so great that they become enmeshed with those that they are leading, ceasing to be able to effectively execute many of the duties of leadership such as thinking clearly and objectively, holding people accountable for results, and preserving directional focus to the team's efforts. Enmeshment is when someone chooses a limitless "togetherness" to avoid a sense of anxiety about alone or rejected. Steinke even notes that leader indecisiveness can be a form of this kind of emotional reactivity because it functions as a defense mechanism against having to take a stand that might threaten the perceived relational harmony of the group.<sup>8</sup> McCloskey observes that these types of leaders "feel duty bound to respond to the 'need' of others, *no matter the nature of the need* (italics mine)."<sup>9</sup> These leaders are unable to function as responsible adults due to the strength of their need for approval or emotional security. Emotional fusion takes place when the leader abandons a healthy sense of self for a form of peace and harmony, no matter how dysfunctional it may be. The emotionally fused leader is afraid and unable to be separate enough to lead. Rima issues the warning that, "We cannot expect to provide strong leadership if our self-leadership is so ineffective that we are unable to overcome our own fears and worries."<sup>10</sup>

Emotional cutoff is the other extreme reaction of the emotionally immature person or leader who is unable to stay differentiated. While the undifferentiated leader who becomes enmeshed with their followers essentially chooses relational togetherness to the complete neglect of healthy separateness, the leader who emotionally cuts off is choosing self to the complete neglect of togetherness. Emotional cutoff can manifest itself in many ways, but it occurs in leadership when leaders are unable to stay connected relationally out of their reactivity to others. Emotionally cutoff leaders end up withdrawing, disconnecting, ignoring, "scapegoating" or avoiding their followers and their followers' needs. Another way of putting it is that emotionally

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<sup>8</sup> Steinke, 13.

<sup>9</sup> McCloskey, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel D. Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out : The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 189.

cutoff leaders go “all bad” on their followers to preserve their own sense of self.

Leaders who react to followers by cutting off emotionally add to the followers’ anxiety by directly or indirectly communicating that the followers’ well-being is secondary to the interests of the leader and organization. In these situations, follower anxiety will tend to rise in proportion to the degree that they feel objectified or *used* by their leaders. In addition to lacking both self-awareness and the capacity for self-regulation, leaders who emotionally cutoff from their followers tend to be especially deficit in that component of emotional maturity that McCloskey identifies as resonance and relational connection.

Neither emotional fusion nor emotional cutoff are acceptable alternatives for the ministry leader who is entrusted with stewarding a vision and direction as well a team of other leaders who also have been made in the image of God. Emotional fusion paralyzes the leader from leading. Emotional cutoff undermines the credibility and spiritual authority that the leader has. Both are a reflection of a lack of differentiation and emotional maturity in the leader. In both cases, “the anxious leader leaves the congregation without real leadership.”<sup>11</sup> Having a healthy sense of self and a foundation of emotional maturity is necessary to helping leaders affirm the dignity and humanity of their co-laborers as well as getting the most out of their people for the sake of missional effectiveness.

### **Differentiation and Identity**

Peter Scazzero, in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* describes three temptations common to mankind that are especially relevant for those in leadership. Jesus encountered these three temptations in the wilderness at the hand of Satan in Matthew 4. These temptations tested Jesus’ own emotional maturity and level of self-differentiation and security prior to his public ministry. Scazzero summarizes that the temptations were centered on three alternative sources for Jesus’ identity and sense of personal security. They are performance (I am what I do), possession (I am what I have), and popularity (I am what others think).<sup>12</sup>

These temptations are ever present in leadership as over-achievement, comparison, and people pleasing run rampant in society. Scazzero describes differentiation as, “The degree to which you are able to affirm your distinct values and goals apart from the pressures around you (separateness) while remaining close to people important to you (togetherness).”<sup>13</sup> In an effort to help leaders resolve this tension, Heifetz and Linsky stress the importance of distinguishing between your “personal self, which can serve as an anchor in stormy weather, and your professional role, which never will.”<sup>14</sup> The leader who cannot differentiate his or her own personal value and significance apart from their professional role or performance is likely to respond with anxiety to the relational demands of those they lead. The leader whose sense of

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<sup>11</sup> Steinke, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality : Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 75-77.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, "A Survival Guide for Leaders," *Harvard Business Review* 80, no. 6 (06 2002): 65-72. 73.

personal value is driven by their professional performance just simply has too much personal identity at stake in their own success to be truly free to listen to and absorb the many needs and wants of their followers and those around them.

The Apostle Paul documents an example in his letter to the Galatians of how one of the pillars of the early church, Peter, failed to lead out of a secure sense of self along with the resulting consequences of his failure in leadership. Paul writes that Peter was eating with Gentiles with a clear conscience until a group of Jews from James arrived. Paul writes, “but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.” (Gal. 2:12) In the face of follower expectations, Peter withdrew and separated from his Gentile brothers. It appears Peter’s anxiety overwhelmed him as he temporarily severed ties with the Gentiles because of the cultural pressures of the Jews. The unity of the fellowship was broken because of Peter’s fear and anxiety. Paul appropriately speaks into Peter’s life in this situation, bringing the perspective of the gospel into Peter’s leadership behavior. In this early church ministry scenario, Peter is exposed as being anxious in response to Jewish pressures while Paul shows himself to be secure enough to withstand these pressures and speak the truth of the gospel into a fellow ministry leader’s life.

The benefits of emotional maturity for one’s own peace of mind are great, but having the emotional maturity to differentiate who you are apart from the demands of others will also have a significant impact on how those you lead will experience you. Having one’s identity anchored in performance, possession, or popularity is like building one’s house on the sand. One’s security or sense of self is going to be very much based on circumstances and this in turn enslaves one to a self-centered view of leadership. One cannot be free to serve others when so much is personally at stake in terms of identity in his or her leadership interactions. The Apostle Peter offer these words to the person tempted to find their security in fleeting and worldly sources: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time.” (1 Pet. 5:6)

Personal security for the ministry leader must be anchored in one’s identity as established by their relationship with Christ. Through Christ, one experiences unconditional love and approval that is secure and eternal. Because the ministry leader is found in Christ, there is no need to seek out elsewhere what one already has (Gal. 5:1). In Christ, there is a freedom to lead without making things about one’s own identity (Phil 2:3-4), because those core issues have been settled (John 8:38). Steinke summarizes this dynamic well writing, “The more you can feel safe as a child of God, the freer you will be to claim your mission in the world as a responsible human being.”<sup>15</sup> The leader who is on the journey of internalizing one’s identity in Christ in the context of community will be personally secure enough to lead towards the mission as an emotionally separate individual, but in the context of emotionally connected relationships. This is what Jesus modeled – that even on the cross in his moment of greatest rejection, he was still moving towards his accusers by interceding to the Father for their forgiveness (Luke 23:34).

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<sup>15</sup> Steinke, 158.

## Differentiation and Communication

A common consequence of a leader who either emotionally fuses with their followers or who emotionally cuts off from their followers is the failure to open the channels for healthy, trust-building communication. One's partnering ability is going to be enhanced or hindered in large part due to their capacity for open and honest communication that can allow for greater levels of trust. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians that communication that is both truthful *and* loving is part of the process that leads to greater personal *maturity* (4:15) as well as greater *community results* (4:15-16). Paul warns the church in Ephesus to lay aside *falsehood* and engage in honest and open communication with his neighbor. Differentiated, emotionally mature leaders are able to put aside the falsehood that insecurity breeds and be beacons of truth and honesty in relationships, demonstrating a commitment to reality as well as the empowerment of the community.

Out of their fear and insecurity, the undifferentiated leader will have a hard time sustaining and cultivating this kind of open and honest communication. The failure to do so weakens the foundations of the team and distances team members from the leader. LaFasto and Larson write, "It's too hard for team members to contribute, much less explore the possibilities, when it is not safe for them to say what's on their minds."<sup>16</sup> In contrast, emotionally mature leaders "don't allow their insecurities to get in the way of the job at hand, and they don't labor to create their own persona."<sup>17</sup> Differentiated leaders are committed to environments of honesty where trust and safety can develop between leaders and followers. Maybe more importantly, differentiated leaders have the personal security to actually lead towards environments of trust and safety, while the emotionally insecure will have a hard time producing in a group what they do not possess in their inner person.

Emotionally immature leaders may exchange this open and honest communication for a kind of "controlled honesty." This controlled honesty gives the appearance of trust building communication, but it lacks some of the ingredients necessary for trust to be built between people, especially between leaders and followers. The lack of differentiation in leadership leads to a lack of safety in communication. Followers or those without the organizational power are going to determine the safety of the environment on the basis of how secure and differentiated their leaders are. If followers perceive their leaders to be overly anxious or personally insecure in their leadership, they will hold back greatly because this lack of differentiation hinders trust. Followers engage open and honest communication with their leaders when they trust that their leaders are secure enough to handle the communication and that there will not be backlash for truthful communication.

## Leader Self-Differentiation and Culture

Emotionally immature or poorly differentiated leaders who "cutoff" from or "fuse" with their teams and followers set in motion "unspoken rules" that begin to shape the architecture of

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<sup>16</sup> Frank M. J. LaFasto and Carl E. Larson, *When Teams Work Best : 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell what it Takes to Succeed* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001), 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

their working environment that tend to conform to the level of anxiety within the leader. “Because they are not said out loud, you don’t find out that they’re there until you break them.”<sup>18</sup> Unspoken rules can effectively silence the community on important matters and function as a “fortress wall of protection,” protecting the emotionally immature leader from any challenge or criticism. The implicit culture that is driven by the character, identity, and behavior of the leader or leaders is almost always more powerful than the explicitly communicated norms and values.

Emotionally mature leaders embrace the reality that, “The team leader has the greatest responsibility for making free expression safe.” LaFasto and Larson add that, “It is the team leader’s job to remove artificial barriers to communication and lower the real ones.”<sup>19</sup> Healthy, honest, and adult communication protects against unspoken rules and silent agreements, and promotes clarity and responsibility in the working environment for everyone. Promoting healthy and honest communication requires a secure leader as well as a leader who, as McCloskey discusses, is committed to a humble and honest assessment of reality. Low differentiation of self in leadership will hinder and potentially even enslave team members through these unspoken rules while those with healthy differentiation of self are free to continually serve their people, helping to empower them towards making their greatest contribution to the Kingdom.

The unspoken rules and architecture of how people communicate and relate is really what many refer to as “culture.” Culture can either work against the vision and direction of the community or serve as a powerful catalyst towards the community’s desired results. Caruso and Salovey relay an example of how new Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina challenged the culture of HP in her successful effort to lead change in their book *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager*.<sup>20</sup> She reflects, “When culture turns into groupthink, when culture turns into closed minds, when culture turns into ‘act the same, be the same, look the same,’ that is when culture starts to kill a company.”<sup>21</sup> Even though Fiorina herself has a reputation as a fairly narcissistic leader, this piece of wisdom should not be neglected.

Undifferentiated leaders will tend to produce groupthink because differences and individuality are seen much more as a threat to their leadership success than a vital source of learning, sharpening, and creativity. Heifetz and Laurie state that, “A leader has to have the emotional capacity to tolerate uncertainty, frustration, and pain. He has to be able to raise tough questions without getting too anxious himself.”<sup>22</sup> Emotionally mature leaders are able to keep one foot outside of the culture to be able to critically and humbly evaluate the honest reality, but are also able to stay connected with people and be a part of the culture so that they can

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<sup>18</sup> David Johnson and Jeffrey VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church*, (2005) 67.

<sup>19</sup> LaFasto and Larson, 109.

<sup>20</sup> David Caruso and Peter Salovey, *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager: How to Develop and use the Four Key Emotional Skills of Leadership* (Hoboken: Books In Print, (c) 2007 R.R. Bowker LLC; Jossey-Bass [Imprint]; John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated Publisher Record, March 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 207. From “Catching Up with Carly Fiorina.” San Jose Mercury News, April 13, 2003. Available online: [www.siliconvalley.com/mld/mercurynews/business/5624255.htm](http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/mercurynews/business/5624255.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Heifetz and Laurie, 135.



continually build trust with their followers and empower them for service. Heifetz and Laurie call describe the big picture aspect of this balancing act as “going to the balcony,” a needed discipline for a leader if he or she is going to avoid getting “swept up in the field of action.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Self-Differentiation and Leadership Development (Next Steps for the Young Leader)**

The concept of self-differentiation is fairly complex when one considers the numerous factors that all work together to shape our sense of identity and self. First, the leader needs to engage in honest and reflective self-work so that he or she can develop the self-awareness or capacity of emotional recognition. Second, the leader needs to learn how to regulate his or her emotional life in community. Peter Scazzero offers some very helpful thoughts on how a leader can grow in his or her emotional maturity in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*.<sup>24</sup> He explains what it means for the leader to “Break the Power of the Past” and “Embrace the Gift of Limits” among other things. This “self-work” that the leader must engage involves exploring family influences, life experiences, and personal limitations. All of this has as its aim continued sanctification through Christ and a humble and sober assessment of one’s self and leadership (Rom. 12:3). Differentiation of self will not develop on its own. It requires the leader to work and exercise due diligence in developing an honest assessment of one’s own character and worldview – and those powerful unseen forces that have helped shaped them. One cannot do this without honest and trusted input from other people.

Pastor Jan Hettinga of Northshore Baptist Church in Bothell, Washington reflects, “The safest, healthiest, most effective ministry leaders are those who tap into greater grace through lifestyle repentance and voluntary humility.”<sup>25</sup> This reflects one of the ways that a leader can learn to lead from an emotionally mature foundation. McCloskey recommends that one of the best ways to move towards others, as a leader is to “lean into feedback.”<sup>26</sup> So many of the problems created by a leader’s lack of differentiation can be eliminated by a willingness to humbly and voluntarily go out of their way to get feedback about themselves or about the community at large. A leader who struggles with his or her level of self-differentiation may be able to better receive feedback or negative input if it is being offered at his or her own initiative. If a leader can proactively ask for help then they may be more able to hear and internalize where change is needed.

In addition to the work of developing self-awareness and proactively learning from community feedback is the work of developing one’s own capacity for self-regulation. Over the years I’ve heard many express how odd it seems to them that self-control is listed by Paul as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23). However, the above discussion of how undifferentiated leaders get derailed in their leadership by responding out of their own anxiety shows just how important it is for the leader to be able so exercise self-control over his or her

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<sup>23</sup> Heifetz and Laurie, 132.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church : A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 223.

<sup>25</sup> Hettinga, Jan. “Protecting Our People From Ourselves.” John R. Cionca, *Dear Pastor : Ministry Advice from Seasoned Pastors* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Pub., 2006), 91.

<sup>26</sup> McCloskey, 5.

emotions in leadership. Exercising self-control in the power of the Holy Spirit is not the same as being emotionally shut down. The fruit of self-control reflects what loving behavior looks like in those moments when there is ample temptation and opportunity to respond reactively as opposed to intentionally and lovingly. Ministry leaders who desire to become more secure in their identity and experience greater self-control in life and leadership can take some steps to grow, but they will not get very far without acknowledging the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives producing the life of Christ within them.

Self-differentiation is not a quest for the sake of self-actualization. The end game for the spiritual leader in becoming more differentiated is to be able to more completely and freely love others and give glory to God. Self-differentiation is the fruit of one's self-examined and Spirit-filled life as it plays out in community. The Holy Spirit and the constructive influence of the people of God are then necessary to one's personal growth and transformation. Self-control as a leader is not the exercise of sheer will or works of effort, which lead to self-focus on one's own performance. Ephesians 2:8-9 reinforces that sheer works or working harder does not achieve the transformation and righteousness that honors God. Self-control rather is the capacity through the Spirit to master one's impulses in a way that honors God and honors others.

Galatians 5:16-26 again provides us a picture of how the life of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit should produce the fruit of self-control (Gal 5:23). The Holy Spirit also produces the fruit of personally security as demonstrated in the fruits of peace and joy (Gal 5:22). And lastly the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of a loving presence in community as shown by the fruits of kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness (Gal 5:22-23). In fact, an argument can be made that Spirit-empowered self-control really can be loving action towards others even though it is primarily an internal work of the Spirit. It is love through restraint in relationships. It captures the kind of internal regulation and security that is needed to be able to move towards other people in maturity and grace. In this way, the fruit of self-control is connected to the concept of self-differentiation. Self-control flows from a posture of dependent obedience and submission to the power of the Holy Spirit and results in greater self-regulation as well as appropriate attentiveness to the needs of others. These are marks of a self-differentiated person and ultimately they lead to a greater capacity to respond appropriately to the relational demands of life.

## **Conclusion**

At the core of the idea of transformational servant leadership lies the notion that genuine, authentic, and spiritually powerful authority in leadership is to be exercised towards the end of empowering followers in a way that results in a mutually beneficial relationship that yields greater results and satisfaction than what could be achieved if the leader-follower dynamic was merely a set of transactions. Ministry leaders that are concerned about multiplying laborers and leaders for the Kingdom cannot afford to lead through mere transactions, yet many continue to do so because of their lack of self-differentiation and emotional maturity. They simply aren't secure enough or emotionally mature enough to lead any other way. They tend to take the leadership short cuts found in reliance upon positions, hierarchies, and policies to get things done as opposed to doing the hard work of building the healthy team or working environments that can yield greater *and* more meaningful results.

Leighton Ford writes that servant leaders, “are those who are able to divest themselves of their power and invest it in their followers in such a way that others are empowered, while the leaders themselves end with the greatest power of all, the power of seeing themselves reproduced in others.”<sup>27</sup> However, leaders can only give power away if they are secure enough in their person to do so. A lack of self-differentiation and emotional maturity in the leader will consistently hinder the leader’s efforts to lead transformationally.

One’s level of emotional maturity may not eliminate the anxiety of followers or team members in the short-run, but it can have a powerful impact on the long run. Differentiation of self in the leader frees both the leader and the follower for greater freedom, trust, and hope. While the undifferentiated leader grows anxious and gets lost emotionally amidst criticism, the emotionally healthy leader is able to inject a calm and steady presence into the community by continuing to lead as a responsible adult and by staying connected relationally. The secure and self-differentiated leader is free to serve and love well as a leader without having to abdicate the roles and responsibilities of leadership. The leader who can continue to do the work of leadership as well as stay in relationship with those they lead, even in anxious times, will more than likely find success for both themselves and the whole of the community.

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<sup>27</sup> Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership : Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 16.

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