

"In *Gravitas* Jerome has bridged the gap  
between spiritual leadership and business leadership."

BOBB BIEHL, executive mentor, Masterplanning Group

*The Monastic*

*Rhythms of*

*Healthy*

*Leadership*

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# GRAVITAS

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JEROME DALEY



*Gravitas* is the playbook for those committed to developing spiritually and emotionally healthy cultures in their spheres of influence.

MIKE MATZINGER, PHD, president of Burlington Chemical Co.

In *Gravitas*, Jerome has bridged the gap between spiritual leadership and business leadership. Combining ancient principles with business practices gives confidence on Monday morning to marry the two realities.

BOBB BIEHL, presidential mentor at Masterplanning Group

Marketplace leaders often feel that leadership success and Christlikeness pull in opposite directions. But what if leadership is the perfect setting for Christlikeness? It can be, and this book illuminates a compelling path for anyone who wants to grow deep to lead large.

CHAD HALL, MCC, director of coaching at Western Seminary

In *Gravitas*, Jerome Daley outlines the process and practices that give a leader true weight. A must-read for anyone ready to deepen their roots and extend their reach.

ANGIE WARD, PHD, leadership author and teacher

Stirring yet practical, drawing on ancient yet relevant principles and practices that are transformative.

FIL ANDERSON, author of *Running on Empty*

With beautifully constructed prose, a passion for leaders to become their best selves, and deeply rooted spirituality, Jerome Daley has created a guidebook that invites engagement with age-old spiritual practices, resulting in real character in the real world.

TINA STOLTZFUS HORST, founder of Coaching Mission International

I wish I had read this book forty years ago!

ED GORE, president and executive director of Fairhaven Ministries

At the beginning of every major spiritual shift in history, God invites men and women into the desert to develop what Jerome Daley refers to as *gravitas*—a spiritual authority gained mostly by enduring loss in God’s presence. If you’re ready to abandon the endless frenzy of ministry expansion and willing to embrace the quiet rootedness of spiritual substance, *Gravitas* will lead you there.

STEVE WIENS, author of *Shining like the Sun*, *Beginnings*, and *Whole*

This in-depth, captivating book looks into the profoundness of making a mark in the world with the strength of God-sized leadership and authority—the kind of leadership that stems from concentrated time in the presence of God, enabling you to lead with the virtues and lens of Christ.

MARY VERSTRAETE, PCC, leadership coach and consultant

A warmly insightful invitation and guide for living and leading in the real world from a place rooted in true desire, faith, and purpose.

CLIF VAN PUTTEN, MD, anesthesiologist, and DESRIE VAN PUTTEN, branch sales manager at Guarantee Real Estate

A profound and highly practical read. A call to become a leader of weight and depth. *Gravitas* is a game changer.

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With refreshingly clear insight and rare vulnerability, Jerome Daley calls us to a place of spiritual centering for the fruitful and flourishing life that we leaders long for.

STEVE HASE, chair of the Greater Charlotte C12 Group

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Well written and challenging in the best of ways, this book is invitation more than admonition; and therein lies its beauty and power.

JEFF HARRIS, president of Jeff Harris and Associates

Succeeds beautifully in helping business leaders create an environment of transformation that our broken world needs so desperately.

DAVID HUGHES, ambassador at the Transforming Center

This book will yield a life of spiritual authority with the ability to swim in an enticing way against the nonstop, depleting world we are living in.

ROY KING, adjunct professor of ministry studies at Columbia International University

This is a valuable and practical guide for deep spiritual-character formation. Daley builds on ancient Christian disciplines to provide insights and inspiration to anyone in Christian leadership who wants to heal and strengthen their soul.

ROBERT A. FRYLING, author of *The Leadership Ellipse*



*The Monastic*

*Rhythms of*

*Healthy*

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JEROME DALEY



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*Blessed is the one . . .  
 . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD,  
 and who meditates on his law day and night.  
 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
 which yields its fruit in season  
 and whose leaf does not wither—  
 whatever they do prospers.*

PSALM 1:1-3



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# Introduction



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*What gentler encouragement could we have, my dear brothers  
and sisters, than that word from the Lord calling us to himself  
in such a way! We can see with what loving concern the  
Lord points out to us the path of life.*

*RULE OF ST. BENEDICT, prologue*

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WHO DO YOU KNOW who carries substance as a leader? Not extraordinary talent or compelling charisma or impressive expertise, just substance. Weight of character. An unusual presence.

We might call it spiritual gravitas. Such men and women rarely seek the spotlight or dominate the room, but when they speak, you sense that their words rise from a deep core. Intuitively, you know they carry a tensile strength forged in the heat of both victories and defeats. They have paid the price for the truths that now flow from their mouths, words that in turn evoke depths of trust and confidence. You feel drawn to them and secure in their presence, quietly inspired by something that's hard to name.

Other leaders take up an impressive amount of space in a crowd. A commanding voice. Unshakable confidence. Some type of magnetic personality. All eyes turn when they rise . . . and they rise often. You feel drawn to them as well, maybe even electrified by force of personality. But at the end of the day, you're not sure

how far you could trust them, not certain you would put your life on the line for them.

Years ago, I attended a small conference. The speaker had a modest following and a few books, but he was only really known within a fairly tight circle. Yet there was something I felt instantly. *Gravitas. Spiritual authority.* I was captivated, and I listened to him for hours without losing interest. Even more, I felt like something deep and true was being mysteriously established in me as he spoke.

The word *gravitas* might evoke images of somber faces and dreary tones, maybe even an intimidating aura, but none of that was true of this speaker. With an easy smile, he spoke softly in slow, thoughtful sentences with very little drama of presentation. It was not exactly a TED Talk, yet I sat rapt with attention, content to let his words wash over me and seep inside.

I think that's the thing about gravitas: It begets more gravitas. I have sometimes imagined myself becoming a dashing, charismatic speaker who could stir crowds and be much in demand. And while there's nothing wrong with that, this guy made me want something different. I found myself wanting to speak from that same deep place, to carry a more grounded substance of being. This man will never know that he set my life course on a new trajectory.

## Got Weight?

*Gravitas* is a Latin word that mirrors our English word *gravity*, anchored in the idea of weight. “Dignity, presence, influence” — these descriptors attempt to capture the effect that such a quality of character has on others.<sup>1</sup> In the social stampede for overt power, there is little demand for gravitas. But when you feel this subtle force in someone, you know instinctively that they are anchored

to the earth, immune to the winds of fad and fashion. They don't usually soar in popularity or plunge in ignominy. They are here today and here tomorrow, steadily elevating those around them with kindness and wisdom.

Over the past decade, I have coached many leaders, from starry-eyed entrepreneurs to buttoned-down corporate types, from savvy business owners to burned-out pastors, and all sorts in-between. Each juggles talent and passion; each navigates setbacks and celebrates wins. Coaching is a great job, and I love watching people become the best version of themselves.

Here's the thing: Almost no one hires me for character formation or spiritual growth. People hire me to achieve something that has dollars attached to it: starting a company, writing a book, training a work group, or coaching a key performer. All of these are good things, and I find joy in such meaningful work. *But there is always a bigger story available behind that desire.* Achieving an organizational goal or completing a project is the canvas on which the deeper work of formation is being crafted. And it is the soul more than the project that will endure—which brings us to the heart of the matter.

### **A Marketplace in Upheaval**

Leadership development is a billion-dollar industry. New skills, new techniques, new lingo, new assessments, new gurus, and new books swing in and out of our attention every quarter like revolving ads on a website. There are a lot of smart people showing us how to do more, do it better, and do it faster than ever before. And in many ways, we have benefited from their strategic thinking and best practices. Time management, organizational theory, and marketplace scrutiny have made most of us better at what we do.

The axiom goes, “Work smarter, not harder,” but for every leader I know who is absorbing all the “smarts” coming at us so furiously, I see a leader who is indeed working harder. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell speculated in 1932 that if we could merely improve our management expertise in society, the average person need only work four hours a day.<sup>2</sup> About the same time, the economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that by the year 2030, a fifteen-hour workweek would be standard fare.<sup>3</sup> Despite those rosy images, a recent Gallup poll placed the current average workweek at forty-seven hours,<sup>4</sup> and most leaders I know would scoff at such a low number.

How does such a busy world allow for so lofty a concept as gravitas? Seriously, who has the time?

But lack of time for gravitas is killing us.

Leaders are burning out and flaming out at an epic rate. The opposite of gravitas surrounds us and blares from every media channel. Moral failures, abuses of power, and ruthless self-promotion are the more obvious symptoms of our anemic national character. In both ministry and the marketplace, we have succumbed to expediency at the cost of integrity. Where is the rootedness? Where is the humility?

We discuss the public falls with dismay and grieve the more private, personal falls. And mostly, we ignore the quieter alternative to burnout and flameout: numbing out. How many leaders have exchanged their passion for disillusionment and slid softly into autopilot?

We must draw the connection between symptoms and the root cause. *The cause is a lack of roots.* Truly, our culture channels a storm that is uprooting many.

Consider a client of mine. Vince is the president of a small

## INTRODUCTION

telecom company that, at \$25 million in gross profits, is modest within its industry. His company was put on the map by selling and installing pay phones. *When is the last time you saw one of those?* Material things, even the best and smartest, eventually decay. The only thing that kept Vince's company from following their phones into extinction was a prudent shift into an entirely different part of the telecom market, where they are now thriving. They survived a potentially catastrophic market storm.

Storms serve a purpose: They expose dangerously weak foundations and invite new construction to our internal worlds. The greater the external pressure on our lives and leadership, the more God whispers to us in those rare still moments. *Step off the gerbil wheel. You were made for more than turning the economic flywheel of industry. You were made for me! And only in me will you be useful in the workplace.* Can you hear that whisper echo in the subterranean cavities of your soul? That divine invitation hangs in the air, directed to you personally.

### Helping Write God's Story

Whether leading in ministry or the marketplace, the men and women I know want to do more than turn a profit and grow an empire; they want to do good in the world. They want to write a redemptive, God-sized story in their spheres. They want their employees to thrive as individuals as well as contribute to the mission. They want the love of God to extend across the planet in ways that ease pain and establish peace. They want the earth to no longer groan under the weight of poverty and pollution and violence. And while they—and all of us—can't do everything, we know in a profound way that we can indeed do something.

Another client owns a successful professional business: Janet Ward and fortyish employees bring in about \$5 million a year. Commendable, but not necessarily remarkable. But here's what *is* remarkable: *They give away 10 percent of their revenue!* That's right, they tithe on the gross, putting half a million dollars every year into about fifty nonprofits across the planet that are making life better for tens of thousands.<sup>5</sup> That is spiritual influence. That is something we don't have enough of in today's marketplace.

Spiritual substance. Depth. Weight. Spiritual gravitas. Where could we possibly turn to find a supply of such intangibles? What ancient cache could we open to obtain a spiritual rootedness that can withstand cultural storms and change the world for good in modern times?

## A Wealth of Gravitas

What if there was a whole culture of spiritual substance, carefully cultivated over generations, with intentional practices and dedicated focus on the inner life? A leadership community that was all about going deep, not wide? What if there were cloisters of men and women who had anchored themselves in the life of God so that they could speak the words of God with quiet power?

Actually, this is part of our heritage. In Ireland, they were called Celts; in Russia, they were called *poustinikki*; in Egypt, they were called desert fathers and mothers. But the most common and inclusive word for these men and women of spiritual gravitas is *monks*.

The particulars of their lives, the qualifications of their communities, and the emphasis of their spiritual activities were as varied as their times and places dictated. And our own modern world calls for its own applications that relate directly to the needs of our

time and place. The lifestyle of the monastery cultivated the very spiritual depth we feel such a dearth of today. *We can no longer meet the complexity of today's leadership challenges from the superficiality and shallowness of today's leadership culture.* We must reach back to a simpler time for deeper resources in order to become “monks in the marketplace.”

## My Own Gravititas Failures

Let me get personal for a moment. When I speak of leading from a shallow, superficial space, I mean that I've not only seen it in others but have also known it intimately in my own journey. In my career, I've experienced two defining twelve-year cycles that mirrored one another as overarching life lessons. They went something like this: exuberance → performance → disintegration → renewal. I guess I'm a tough case; once wasn't enough!

Straight out of seminary, I launched into the pastorate with my new bride and, although zealous for God and my wife, I promptly displaced both with the mistress of ministry. It's an all-too-common story, and I detail my recovery from it in my first book, *Soul Space*. It took a year's sabbatical in the mountains of Colorado to restore my marriage and my soul, and the reorientation was profound. The crucible had done its refining work, but I was just getting started.

Several years later, a new vision emerged, and I launched my executive-coaching business in 2005. Again, I got off to an exciting, profitable start and experienced a steady upward trend for several years. But although my spiritual practices had deepened, they were not yet strong enough to support my growing influence. Over the next several years, my soul began to flounder.

As the recession hit, business took a dive, and I unconsciously correlated profitability with blessing. Like the girl picking petals off a daisy, saying, “He loves me, he loves me not,” my felt experience of God’s affection rose and fell with the tides of my profit and loss statement. Through a long series of humiliations, God began to anchor my feet on the bedrock of his unceasing care for me, and I experienced an upswell of gravitas.

In an intensely personal way, I’ve come to learn that the core truths that comprise our life messages are so precious to God and so fundamental to our callings that many rounds of refining and strengthening are necessary to empower the leadership God intends to bring forth in us. Like layers of an onion, we have to get through one shell to get to the next. In so doing, we pay the price over the course of time and testing to lead with spiritual authority.

This is probably a good time to clarify the sense in which I’m using the expression “spiritual authority.” I do *not* mean it to refer to positional authority, such as pastoral staff or the C-suite. Instead, I’m referring to what we’ve been talking about in these initial pages—*the grace to influence others in redemptive directions by virtue of virtue*, as a result of knowing God deeply and walking with God richly so our influence is inherently God-breathed. This quality often coincides with positional authority yet neither requires it nor can be replaced by it (Matthew 20:25-28).

For illustration, we need not go further than Jesus, a man with little cultural position, yet who continually astounded his listeners, contrasting mightily with the positional authorities of his time: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught *as one who had authority*, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:28-29, emphasis

added). They seemed even more impressed by the authority he carried in word than in deed; the miracles were the evidence of the authority he carried in his person (Matthew 9:6). And authority was precisely what Jesus bestowed on his disciples as he sent them out to extend what he had begun (Matthew 10:1). Isn't it time for us to live in the fullness of that calling once again?

### How Far Is Your Reach?

So it's worth asking, what is the sphere of your spiritual authority? How far is your influence meant to extend? Honestly, most of us don't know—and that's probably by design. If it were further than seems comfortable, we would likely be intimidated . . . and if it were smaller than our ambition, we might well chafe at the constraints. Most of us simply have to live into our destinies one day at a time.

But the reason it's valuable to consider our reach lies in the classic illustration of the branches on a tree. Perhaps you know that the network of roots underneath a tree extend horizontally in roughly the same dimension as the branches.<sup>6</sup> So a tree with a twenty-foot branch radius, like the weeping cherry in my backyard, would have a tangle of roots with approximately the same spread beneath the surface. And the towering willow oak just outside our fence probably has root tendrils that extend almost sixty feet in diameter! *Talk about biological gravitas.*

The influence of leaders can easily outgrow their character. It happens every day. God-engineered giftedness does what it was designed to do: It grows. Branches spread and influence rises. But what was meant for the glory of God is often undermined by a stunted root system, so we now have a leadership landscape virtually littered with capsized "trees," men and women of great

potential and calling whose spiritual formation *in* God was cut short in their rush to do great things *for* God, and maybe even somewhat for themselves.

So how far does your leadership influence extend? How many children rely on your spiritual foundation? How many employees or direct reports? How many in your small group? How many represented by the nonprofit board you're on? How many read your books or blog, listen to your podcast, or are on your payroll? Frankly, we have little idea of just how much influence we already carry and are usually naively eager for more.

Now think about the roots underneath your tree. How strong are they, and how deep do they run? Can they sustain a class-7 gale with ease, or do they tremble in a summer thunderstorm? Before you grasp after that next promotion or instigate strategic planning for a new satellite office, it might be time to do some root work.

This book is all about helping you extend your roots, deep and far. It's not about helping you be more externally productive but about helping you thrive internally so that you can fulfill God's greatest purpose through you.

At the same time, you're busy. The pressure for productivity is a constant in your life. Is rootedness worth the time? In Jesus' words, "Come . . . and you will see" (John 1:39).

If you're ready to grow your gravitas, come join those who have gone before. Let's learn from the monastics how to go more deep than wide. We don't have to be the spiritual elite; all we need is desire . . . because that is precisely where God meets us and does extraordinary things. Let's get started.

# 1

## SPIRITUAL GRAVITAS

*Not Going Wide but Going Deep*



---

*Let us rouse ourselves from lethargy. . . . Let us open our eyes to the light that can change us into the likeness of God. Let our ears be alert to the stirring call of his voice crying to us every day.*

RULE OF ST. BENEDICT, prologue

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TINA IS THE FOUNDER AND CEO of a global-missions agency that provides coaching and training for cross-cultural leaders around the world. Her organization equips leaders as they prepare for service, walks with them as they work in host countries, and then supports them as they cross cultures again upon their return home. She is very good at what she does.

Tina came to me for two reasons: She wanted to write a career-defining book, and she was seriously overextended. She might not have been in burnout, but she was certainly getting crispy around the edges. And her two coaching agendas held an ironic tension between them.

The cause of her overextension was as ubiquitous as her title: a tightly stretched calendar, overtaxed budgets, highly complex

planning for overseas events, frayed-edge relationships. Dilemmas landed on her desk more quickly than solutions could be generated, multiplying pressure and frustration. In short, she was spread broad and shallow. Her “branches” had overextended her “roots,” and intuitively, she knew it.

Eight months later—after a host of conversations shared, pages written, and spiritual practices employed—I started to hear different words from Tina: words like *happier, relaxed, less pressure, a wider perspective*. We continued to work together for another couple of years as both her book and her soul took healthier shape. Tina’s leadership challenges never lessened, but she was better able to support them as she deepened her roots and laid serious boundaries against overextension—not unlike some of our biblical mentors. Let’s take a look.

## Overextension and Redemption

Moses got a crash course on overextension when his leadership gifts were activated without the character to sustain them. As a Hebrew raised in the Egyptian court of Pharaoh, he intervened against the oppression of his fellow Israelites. But he did so without the benefit of gravitas: He lost his temper and killed a man . . . and lost the chance to exert the influence God had planned for him as a national leader. The roots were shallow, and the tree came down. Fortunately, God’s habit of redeeming our blunders brought Moses back around to the same calling forty years later, when his roots had grown out substantially.

It’s worth noting that when it comes to spiritual gravitas, Moses carried some serious weight in his second career. Power confrontations with Pharaoh, parting a sea, and bringing water out of a rock

are just a few of the evidences of his genuine spiritual authority. But my favorite shows up at the conclusion of a mountaineering expedition, when Moses returned from a God encounter and his face was physically glowing (Exodus 34:29-35). A visible light emanated from the pores of his skin as manifestation of the presence of God that rested on him. I'd call that spiritual authority. How about you?

Many years later, when Israel occupied the Promised Land, the nation was ruled by judges. One of the most powerful of these was a woman named Deborah. She carried immense authority, particularly in that patriarchal culture, and was, first and foremost, a judicial leader who settled disputes that naturally arose among the tribes. Later she was a military leader who inspired courage and laid out strategy when the heart of the nation had fallen to a low ebb. Her gravitas led to a forty-year peace for her people (Judges 4-5).

Many years later again, similar spiritual weight captured great attention in the wake of Peter and John's testimony before the Sanhedrin. Having just healed a man and preached to a large crowd, much to the chagrin of the Jewish power base, these two disciples were dragged into court to give an account for themselves. The author Luke records that "when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

### Authority by Proximity

What was true then is still true now: *Concentrated amounts of time in the presence of God change us.* Ancient spiritual practices

transform our character and anchor us in a heavenly reality that shines out of us, either physically or metaphysically, with spiritual authority. This spiritual afterglow is not for ego or entertainment; instead, it opens a channel for God to do what God wants to do. That's the bottom line. God's redemptive agenda is facilitated by men and women who have been with Jesus and who carry his authority.

Among the women and men I coach, I hear a desire for *not more breadth but more depth*, not more tasks and responsibilities but the chance to do a better job at what they're already juggling. They yearn for a sense of rootedness that stabilizes the soul in the midst of chaos. Jesus described a house built on solid rock in a well-known story: Its foundations ran so deep and strong that a veritable hurricane couldn't dislodge it (Matthew 7:24-25). Stormproof leadership is deep-rooted, not overextended.

The ultimate spiritual gravitas was carried, of course, by Jesus himself. And of the many examples we could look at, we'll tag just one for now. Jesus was nearing the Crucifixion and had wrestled with God in prayer all night. As the eastern sky lightened ever so slightly, Judas the betrayer led a detachment of soldiers to place Jesus under arrest. Arriving with torches blazing and swords drawn, they were an intimidating force; it was a scary time for the disciples.

John is the only Gospel that records this particular account of Jesus' force of presence. "Who is it you want?" Jesus asked. "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. *A pregnant pause.* "I am he" was his simple reply . . . but as these words crossed Jesus' lips, the entire detachment of battle-hardened soldiers "drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6). Wow. That was some serious juice.

I doubt any of us are looking for a spiritual force field that

knocks people down . . . Well, I take that back. In some meetings, that could come in handy! But certainly we *are* looking for a strength of leadership that goes far beyond the best practices of the secular sphere. We need more than Gallup polls and industry trends, more than power talks and power naps and power ties and power lunches. As useful as those may be, we need something rock-solid under our feet.

We need the daily life force of God flowing in our veins, rocking our worlds, infusing our minds with wisdom and our souls with joy, stormproofing our minds and anchoring our convictions with monk-like serenity and compassion.

### The Cost of Spiritual Gravitas

This kind of leadership substance cannot be announced in a press release; it must be felt. It cannot be rushed or faked; it must be earned. “Earning” is funny language to use in the realm of the Spirit, where mercy rules and personal performance falls ridiculously short of divine love, a love that cannot be increased or diminished. God’s delight in us and commitment to us is gratuitous. Unceasing. Unearnable.

But some things are not bestowed; they are paid for in blood, sweat, and tears. Think about honor. Trust. Integrity. Character. And yes, spiritual authority. These commodities carry a price tag, one that not all leaders are prepared to pay. True gravitas is egoless, and the journey to that particular freedom is arduous for all of us. We typically have to reach and fall, then reach and land through many iterations of God’s patient, gentle invitation toward a life of love. *Love is both the beginning and the end of trustworthy spiritual leadership.*

Even Jesus had to earn his spiritual authority. Remember? He laid aside the divine power he carried in heaven to enter earth (Philippians 2:6-8). Commissioned by Father and Spirit in a river baptism, he was sent immediately into the proving ground of the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). If anyone should get a free pass on gravitas, I think it would be Jesus . . . but even here, the roots must go down in the epicenter of the storm. And a fierce storm it was. Weakened physically from lack of food and water, Jesus faced three temptations that all leaders must face. See if you recognize them.

The spiritual writer Henri Nouwen describes these three with artful precision: the temptation to be *relevant* (turning stones into bread), the temptation to be *spectacular* (leaping off the Temple), and the temptation to be *powerful* (taking control of human wealth and rule).<sup>1</sup>

What's so wrong with being relevant or powerful . . . or even spectacular? On the face of it, nothing. But underneath the surface, something fundamental is being established: the *source* of Jesus' gravitas. Even the Son of God had to relinquish his human authority in order to participate in the divine life—as do we (2 Peter 1:3-4).

We will return to this scene again, but until we, too, pass these tests as leaders, we will be spiritually untrustworthy, attempting to do good things with fatally flawed motivations. Yes, there is a cost for spiritual authority, but the return on investment is huge. Without divine authority, all we're left with is human power, and even when well-intentioned, that tends to generate collateral damage.

Character that goes the distance doesn't come by happenstance; it comes by enduring the hard places . . . for a long time

. . . without quitting. Paul said it this way: “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” (Romans 5:3-5). Men and women of spiritual gravitas have character with deep roots, birthed by persevering through difficulty and marked by profound hope. And, I might add, joy.

So the theory is good, and the biblical model is sound. We want to be this kind of leader. We don’t want to be double-minded, self-doubting; we don’t want to choke in the clutch. We don’t want to be “blown and tossed by the wind,” as James described those without adequate character (James 1:6). We want to be a rock of strength, calm under fire. We want to inspire and equip those who look to us. We want to advance the purposes of God on the earth. *But how?*

Seriously, how do we do this?

## A Road Map for Gravitas

To become modern monks, we now turn to the ancients. Of the many monastic orders that influenced the world for good, one stands out in its construction, its longevity, and its impact: the Benedictines.

It was roughly AD 480 when Benedict was born, the son of a nobleman who seemed destined for a life of leisure and affluence. Instead, at about the age of twenty, Benedict became disillusioned with the meaninglessness of it all, left his studies in Rome, and traveled forty miles east to the mountain town of Enfide. There he discovered a cave overlooking a lake, where he proceeded to

live as a hermit for the next three years, growing his character in a place of solitude.

Benedict was invited to become the abbot of a nearby monastery in Subiaco, where he spent the next few years enduring the territorialism and hostility of neighboring monks before leaving to form twelve of his own monasteries in the region. He eventually founded the great monastery of Monte Cassino in AD 529 on a hilltop between Rome and Naples. This gentle monk is often considered the founder of western monasticism due to the influence of his spiritual authority and his writings on the spiritual life.

The Benedictines are famous for their “Rule of Life,” a written set of principles and practices that anchored their lives and ordered their ministry. Over the course of this book, you will be invited to rough out some of the principles and practices on which you will base your leadership in the coming years. Don’t be intimidated by this: It can be as simple or elaborate as you wish. What’s important is that it flows out of your own earnest inquiry and that the practices help you become and remain the most authentic version of yourself, the woman or man God knows you can be and is inviting you to become.

## The Secrets of the Monastery

Those who joined the Benedictine order had to take three vows and commit themselves to five specific practices. These will form the structure for our conversation in this book; the upcoming chapters will track with those vows (or principles) and the practices that flow out of those vows. We will look briefly at what these commitments might have meant in their time and then, more importantly, how to live in the spirit of these principles

and practices in ways that speak to the pressing needs of our immediate world.

On a practical note, the term *monk* will be used gender-inclusively in this book, as befits the Greek origins of the word (*monachos*). In modern times, the word *nun* is often used to refer to women monastics, but all the principles we will explore in this book apply equally to both women and men. And while our context will be largely around leadership roles, the spiritual practices I suggest will deepen and enrich the lives of anyone.

If, like me, you are a Protestant, I encourage you to open your heart to a tradition that may feel foreign. The monastic heritage predates most of the church divisions that must now grieve the heart of God (John 17:20-23). I grew up in a charismatic, nondenominational, low-church, highly contemporary spiritual tradition, and in the years since, I have worshiped with a wide array of denominational gatherings. The practices described by Benedict are as theologically orthodox and centrist as any you'll find, although in places you'll also find them wrapped in ancient language that may be new to you.

At this point in the chapter, you may feel inspired but also a little daunted. Don't be. *Your spiritual formation is not merely another set of tasks for your to-do list!* It is a fundamental change to your way of being in the world, and the result—I hope—is that your to-do list will have less tyranny over your life.

If you are a business owner or a business manager, this is your chance. Get ready to put down some roots. If you are a pastor or a ministry leader, get ready to deepen your character and connect more strongly with God. In years past, marketplace leaders often looked to ministry leaders to show them the way. These days, ministry leaders are often infatuated with secular models of leadership

and have largely lost the spiritual authority to model the gravitas needed in today's world. Secular models of leadership do indeed offer important practical insights, and we should take advantage of them. But we cannot help contemporary society reclaim its soul without something more powerful and enduring. To become modern monks in the marketplace, we must go deep in order to lead large.

### Relinquishing Our Programs for Happiness

Going deep invites us to come to terms with a cluster of vulnerabilities we all share—three instincts that touch our deepest human longings: *control*, *affection*, and *security*. This orientation is so pervasive in the human journey that we will return to it again and again. Let's dig into it right here at the beginning.

A large chunk of our words, attitudes, and behaviors flows directly out of one of these three motivations: We try to power up in situations to avoid feeling out of control; we reach discretely to earn approval and affection from those whose opinions we value; we create agendas (seen and unseen) to feel more safe and secure in an unpredictable world. This is not some of us; this is all of us.

It was a modern monk, Thomas Keating, who coined the expression “emotional programs for happiness” to describe our human instincts toward meeting these legitimate needs in illegitimate ways.<sup>2</sup> He observed these three tendrils and then described how they creep into our behavior as vain efforts to be happy. We all want to be happy. And the lack of control, affection, and security feels noticeably unhappy!

What is fascinating to me is how each of the Benedictine vows confronts one of these programs of human longing with divine

supply. We long for these three qualities in our lives (one in particular, based on our personality) not because they are bad but because they are good. The quandary comes when we cannot generate them for ourselves—and we never really can.

No matter how much we posture and jockey for power (even in our own lives, not to mention in others' lives), when are we ever really in full control? And how much power do we wield to make people like us? The best we can do is try to please, but even here, there is no guarantee of affection. And security? Come on! Even the wealthiest can't buy safety from so many of life's threats. So it's right here that the effervescent happiness that we find in Jesus attests to the impact of the gospel: *We don't have to!* We don't have to spin our wheels in desperate efforts to be safe, loved, and strong because God has already offered those gratuitously. Free and clear. On the house. We can't generate them; we can only receive them.

What an incredible relief.

Our emotional programs for happiness get triggered in a big way as we attempt to compensate for our human fragility. And this is where personality takes on distinct form: We criticize others or we criticize ourselves. We work harder or we play harder. We try to solve it in our heads or connect with it in our hearts or bodies. We try to be more different or we try to be more the same. We get angry or fearful or deceptive or aloof as a way of feeling stronger, safer, and more lovable.

There are religious versions of this too. We can subconsciously inflate our spiritual persona. We can subtly (or not so subtly) announce our achievements, responsibilities, or busyness. We can flatter or demand. We can withhold knowledge or intrude with it. We can use overtly spiritual language to buffer our personal

agendas. But none of these strategies work; they do not make us happier. Even when they appear to work, it's an illusion. And the illusion of generating our own happiness is perhaps the greatest danger of all.

So what if you and I don't have to control the people and appearances and circumstances of life? The only way that could be true is if God really has all things under control—the good, the bad, and the ugly all belong and serve their purpose. Dare we believe that? And what if we are all ultimately safe—not from pain or tragedy but in the midst of it? What if God's commitment to our good cannot be compromised by any flaw in ourselves or in others, cannot be unbroken by loss of job or spouse or money or even life itself? Well, that would be security indeed. And what if approval and affection were ours for the taking, unlimited in scope and degree?

Receiving what we crave most around these three needs hinges on two things: our view of God and our view of God's view of us. Is God pleased or angry? Is God merciful or vindictive? Despite all sound theology, it's more likely than not that we experience a vague sense of God's pleasure in those rare moments when we've got all our plates spinning as impressively as possible—and a vague sense of God's disappointment in those more common moments when the plates begin to topple; when we're not getting our devotions in regularly; when we're not getting to the gym regularly; when we're not making it to Bible study regularly; when dinner is burned and the kids are crying and the lawn isn't mowed. How does God feel about us then?

Only a clear eye toward God's unmitigated delight in us has the capacity to evoke the abiding experience of approval, security, and control that we need in our depths. Our ability to feel approved by

God, to feel the security of his embrace, and to entrust ourselves to his control—each of these depends on our view of God.

Wow, can you feel your roots going down even as we consider these profound truths? This is a groundedness beyond expectation. This is where gravitas begins.

Even though we are going to explore the monastics, we don't live cloistered lives: We live in the thick of life, which is exactly where God's ways are needed most. But we can't carry something we don't have, and that takes us to our own personal monastery—the space where we cultivate our awareness of God and of God's transforming grace in our lives through spiritual practice.

## INTO THE MONASTERY

Each chapter ends with an invitation into the sacred space of solitude by suggesting exercises in personal reflection, evaluation, practice, or refocus. For now, simply jot down some thoughts around the following questions:

1. What are the most perplexing challenges confronting my leadership today?
2. What connections do I see between spiritual depth and marketplace effectiveness?
3. How would I evaluate my current spiritual authority?
4. If I were mentoring a new leader, what spiritual practices would I suggest for the development of his or her “root system”?

## IN COMMUNITY

One of the gifts of the monastery is *community*. As a young man, Benedict left a very secure world of status to seek a more spiritual center to his life. He spent the next three years living alone in a cave, deepening his own spiritual roots. But although Benedict was no stranger to solitude, his passion was to cultivate community—to create a spiritually rich environment where monks could live and learn and grow together over the years.

Similarly, you will glean the most from your journey through this book if you are in a small community that focuses on this purpose—perhaps a small group that already enjoys fellowship together or one where you gather specifically for this reason. At the least, invite one close spiritual friend to share the journey with you. The benefits are numerous if you think about it.

- *Disclosure is intrinsically formative.* Transparency—honesty with yourself and honesty with trusted others—is the first prerequisite for personal transformation. It’s pretty tough to grow your soul and your practice without naming your current condition in a safe place. Together with others who are eager for leadership formation, you can walk the road in community.
- *Companionship strengthens resolve.* Isolation makes for easy pickings, but like-minded friends can guard one another’s backs. It’s just too easy to get confused, frustrated, and disillusioned when we’re in it alone. The solidarity that comes from true companions on the journey is priceless.

## SPIRITUAL GRAVITAS

- *Conversation broadens insight.* Transformation is more than practice; awareness and learning take place most powerfully in conversation. Often it's not until we share our experiences—both obstacles and successes—that revelation is kindled, insights are confirmed, and roots are formed.

So the person (or group) I'd like to invite to join me in my exploration of gravitas is . . .



