

one of being discontented. I thought if I just preached faithfully and expected the power of God to be displayed, it would happen easily and quickly and regularly. It didn't. One day I felt the Lord tell me to pursue revival and the things of the kingdom with passion, not to wait passively for their arrival.

So I pursued. And as I pursued, one night the Lord woke me with an audible voice and said, "I am going to teach you about authority." It is the only time the Lord has spoken to me audibly, so I knew this was an important conversation. That night began a new journey in my life. I began to understand that authority is developmental, not just positional. I couldn't wait around passively for God to just show up and make things happen; I had to do my part and develop spiritual authority. And as I began to develop authority, I started to see a new level of demonstration of God's power.

This book will begin to unfold some of the key lessons the Lord taught me about authority that changed my life. I am still learning; I am still growing in spiritual authority. And I am grateful for all the Lord has revealed to me through the Scriptures and His Holy Spirit.

If you want to see a great demonstration of the Lord's presence and power in your life and the lives of those around you so you can advance the kingdom of God to His glory, I pray this book will help you on your journey. May the lessons the Lord has revealed to me benefit you.

ONE: THE ONE IRREPRESSIBLE NEED OF OUR LIFE: THE PRESENCE OF GOD

I used to attend leadership conferences, and rather than leaving with inspiration and ideas, I often left feeling a little depressed. I wasn't sure why, but I knew something was missing. I just didn't know what it was. I was pretty sure it wasn't just me. For all the emphasis on church growth, leadership, and mission that I have heard in my lifetime, according to all the statistics, the church was losing ground. I began to realize that a smaller percentage of people were attending church in the Western world than ever before. I had a simple question: What was wrong?

Something is missing from our leadership model in the church today. If I were to go into most churches and ask about the leadership approach, I would not find much difference between the church leaders and business leaders in that commu-

nity. For the most part, we employ a business leadership model with a little Jesus thrown on top, a bit like whipped cream added on a sundae. We do the things that business leaders do, we practice the principles they practice, we speak the leadership language they speak; we just add on things like an emphasis on character and prayer. But is this the leadership model Jesus demonstrated for us, or is there something more that Jesus wants for us?

I am not against learning leadership principles from business leaders or *New York Times* best-selling leadership books. I know there is a good deal of overlap between the business world of leadership and the kingdom world of leadership. Actually, I have read hundreds of leadership books in my lifetime. We need to learn wisdom, a biblical category of thought, and learning how to lead effectively is a wisdom category people in leadership positions need. We need to learn how to influence people, cast vision, mobilize volunteers on mission, develop strategy, implement plans, allocate resources, and more. But is this all there is to Jesus' leadership? Is this how Jesus built His church? Was Jesus merely an exceptionally developed leader who was flawless in character and deep in prayer? Or was there something different in His approach to leadership? Is there something fundamentally missing in our leadership model that is out of sync with Jesus' leadership approach?

I've listened to hundreds of leadership teachings and read hundreds of leadership books in an attempt to maximize my effectiveness for advancing Jesus' kingdom. I've gained much

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from those efforts. It is worthwhile to grow as a leader, but it is also insufficient. Spiritual leadership involves more than human leadership. Jesus led with authority, and that is what set Him apart.

Not only did I read leadership books, I attended the Leadership Summit put on by the Willow Creek Association every year. I attended for the first seventeen years, and usually I took groups of people with me. I learned a lot, grew a lot, and benefited a great deal from the Summits, and again, I am grateful for their influence in my life. But I also felt a certain reality; as I said at the beginning of this chapter, I always left feeling a bit depressed. I would withdraw emotionally partway through the summit. Some of my staff would ask me, "What happens to you when you attend this? You disappear."

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It took me years to figure it out, but I finally got it.

Every time I went I heard people give inspirational talks about vision-casting, strategic thinking, execution of strategy, developing staff, reproducing leaders, mobilizing volunteers, and many other worthy topics. But I would leave feeling depressed because I felt like I didn't have what it takes to fulfill my God-given calling. My assignment from God felt like a mountain that the best of my human efforts could not move. From the time I was a young man I felt God was calling me to fight for renewal—to be part of a movement where the church was free in Christ and full of the Spirit and the Lord was "adding daily" to our lives "those who were being saved," just as it

says in the book of Acts. I wanted to fight for renewal in the church, and I wanted to see a great awakening in the country that would change the spiritual landscape of the world.

The question that discomfited my soul was this: “How do you lead a spiritual movement with your best human effort? How do you bring about a spiritual renewal with human leadership only?” There must be something more. A spiritual renewal movement cannot be accomplished with human leadership techniques alone. We cannot produce spiritual results with human ingenuity. We need God. And we cannot simply make our best human plans and just ask God to bless them. We need to be the best leaders we can be, but that alone is not enough, and that alone is not how Jesus modeled kingdom leadership.

The weight of my assignment was mounting on me, and I felt stuck. One day I talked to the Lord about my growing discontent with the state of affairs in the church. I felt the Lord telling me to “preach revival until it comes. You aren’t passive about any other area of your life, but you are passively waiting for revival to happen.” I realized He was right; I had always waited passively for revival to happen. I expected since it was my calling that if I just went about my business faithfully, God would bring revival; it would just happen. I figured if I preached, called people to live on mission, and prayed faithfully, eventually revival was bound to come. But it didn’t, and I felt more and more like a failure, like there was something wrong with me, like I didn’t

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Moses Holds the Key

I didn’t want to lead a large and successful church; I wanted to be part of a movement of God that impacted our city, region, country, and world. That was what my heart longed for. But it didn’t happen, and I was getting discontented. However, a shift started in me the day the Lord spoke to me about preaching revival. That seemed like a good idea, but I didn’t understand how to preach revival, and I still felt like I didn’t have what it took. I decided to go away to the monastery to meet alone with God; I knew the Lord had to show me something I had been missing. I knew it had to do with authority since He woke me in the night and spoke to me about that very topic. As I waited on the Lord, I sensed the Spirit saying to me, “Study Moses. He holds the key you are looking for.” As I obeyed, God reacquainted me with Moses, and I saw things I had never seen before. I started learning about authority. Jesus wasn’t just a good leader; Jesus was a man of spiritual authority. And so was Moses.

We read about God’s call to Moses in Exodus 3. This was his assignment: to lead a group of people out of a place where the people didn’t want them to leave, into a place where the people didn’t want them to come, with a group of people who didn’t want to take the trip. Welcome to spiritual leadership! This is what it feels like to be a pastor many days! It was a miserable, “God-only-possible” assignment, and Moses felt inadequate for the task. Who could blame him? His first question upon hearing this impossible assignment was, “Who am I?” He felt the weight of the assignment and the inadequacy of his

leadership ability. He didn't feel like he had what it took as a leader to accomplish this assignment, and, on top of that, his authority was underdeveloped.

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. At first, Moses didn't know this was God. He saw a bush on fire that did not burn up, so he went over to check out this amazing sight. God spoke to him out of the bush, revealing Himself to Moses by saying, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." This is the first time Moses realizes what is happening and to whom he is talking. "At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God." This is the response of someone who carries shame. Shame was blocking Moses from becoming the spiritual leader he needed to be to do the work God was calling him to do.

I teach Soul Care Conferences all over the world, and I call people to come into the light and walk in the light with God and others. I like to use this analogy: Your soul is like a suitcase. I travel a lot, and when I take a trip, I pack nice, neat, clean, folded clothes into my suitcase. By the end of the trip everything is dirty, so I throw all of it in the suitcase and return home. Before I can take my next trip, I have to unpack the suitcase. I have to take out the dirty clothes before I can pack in the nice, neat, clean, folded clothes for my next trip.

Often people are trying to pack the things of God into their lives: freedom, fullness, joy, love, peace, and more godly qualities. But they can't pack those things into the suitcase of their soul because the suitcase is already full. They need to empty the suitcase before they can fill it. Since I call people to unpack the dirty laundry, to bring sin into the light with God, people come to me regularly and say, "I've never told anyone this before." Then they proceed to unpack some secret from the suitcase of their soul. No one ever tells me their secrets and looks

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me in the eye while doing so; they look down at the floor and stumble over their words. That's the power of shame. Shame makes us hide our face. Think about Adam and Eve in the garden: the first thing they did when they rebelled against God was hide. They hid in the garden from God, and they covered up their nakedness. That's shame.

Moses was packing a lot of shame in the suitcase of his soul, and shame always makes you feel inadequate; it makes you feel unworthy. The ultimate question of shame is this: Do I have what it takes? The problem with shame is that it makes things too much about us. Shame produces self-talk filled with self-doubt: "If people really knew me, they wouldn't love me, they wouldn't accept me, they wouldn't follow me. There is something wrong with me. I am broken, damaged, irreparable. I don't have what it takes. Who am I?" Moses had shame because of the murder he committed, striking down and killing an Egyptian in Egypt. He never really dealt with that act; he just ran from it. He had a secret in his soul, and secrets create shame. He relocated to a different area, with different people, and started a different life. But wherever you go, there you are, and you carry your suitcase with you. There is no avoiding it, and whatever you are packing in the suitcase of your soul is impacting you. Moses was packing secrets, and shame was impacting him. Running from your past doesn't keep that past from impacting your present.

Who Am I?

Murder wasn't the beginning of Moses' journey with shame. It started with shame from his family-of-origin issues. Pharaoh set out to kill all the baby boys among the Hebrew slaves because he was afraid the Hebrews were getting too numerous. But Moses' parents sought to save him by shipping him down the river—literally. They put him in a little boat and sent him down the Nile. They did it with pure motives, but when you are a little guy, you can't sort all that out; you just feel rejected and abandoned, unloved and unwanted. Your only way to internalize that event is to once again wonder: *What is wrong with me that even my parents rejected me?* You can't help but feel unloved, unlovable, broken, damaged, and unwanted. This is the beginning of Moses' shame.

Then he was adopted into an Egyptian household, the royal household. But Scripture says the Egyptians wouldn't even eat with Hebrews because that was detestable to them (Genesis 43:32). Moses grew up feeling "less than"; there was prejudice against him. He had significant shame from the rejection and abandonment of his parents, and from the rejection and prejudice he suffered as a former slave boy living in a royal household. Shame is an identity issue that is manifest in community. We often hide when we carry shame because we feel bad about ourselves. We feel that if people really knew us they wouldn't accept us, so we hide from God and others. We build self-protective walls to keep other people from discovering what is in the suitcase of our souls. Many people are so good

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at building walls to hide their shame that they hide it from themselves. They are completely unaware that shame is driving their behavior in life and relationships.

Thus, with all of this shame packed in the suitcase of his soul, when God appears to Moses in the burning bush, and when He first reveals himself to Moses by His name, Moses hides his face (Exodus 3:6). That's shame. Shame makes us afraid to draw near others—especially God. When people struggle with shame, they have intimacy barriers, walls they build to protect themselves from being "found out." If people get too close to us when we carry shame, we feel threatened, fearful, even angry. Sometimes our shame manifests when people get too physically close; we are uncomfortable with close contact. People hug us a little too long and our skin crawls. Other times we feel uncomfortable to get too emotionally close. We share too much about ourselves with a small group of people and we feel violated.

Moses is so fundamentally convinced that he does not have what it takes to fulfill this impossible assignment from God that when God tells him to go to Pharaoh, Moses responds, "Who am I that I should go?" (Exodus 3:11) *Who am I?* He is wrestling with his identity to his core. *Who am I?* I don't have what it takes. *Who am I?* I can't do this. *Who am I?* I am not competent for this assignment. *Who am I?* People won't listen to me; they won't follow me. I can't do this. *Who am I?* This is an assignment beyond my human capacity to lead. *Who am I?* I can't convince Pharaoh to let the people go.

I could relate to Moses; that was exactly how I felt. God had given me an impossible assignment, and I wasn't able to lead people where God was clearly calling me to take them. And no matter how much leadership competency I acquired, I knew the goal was still going to be beyond me. I too had

shame packed away in the suitcase of my soul. There were all kinds of reasons for the shame in my suitcase, just like there were many reasons for Moses' shame.

Let me tell one brief story to indicate how shame is formed, and the power it holds. When I was in second grade my brother had a birthday party at the house. All of his class came over; my brother is a year older than me. We had a downstairs bathroom in that house, and the front porch extended out beyond the bathroom window. It was summer, so the window was open. I went to the bathroom during the party, and a kid named Bruce was out on the porch with the rest of my brother's classmates. He looked in the bathroom window, saw me in there, and started mocking me in front of all of the kids. He shamed me. It was such a powerful event in my life that I wouldn't use a public restroom for years. That's the power of shame; it makes us avoid people and hide.

When shame afflicts the soul, the mind works overtime to compensate, to question, to figure it out. Sometimes our minds are tormented with self-doubt. Other times we move toward grandiosity where we compare ourselves with others and imagine ourselves or even fantasize about ourselves in grandiose ways, all the while trying to bolster our identity, which is damaged by shame. We see ourselves in bigger-than-life ways to compensate for our inner sense of inadequacy and shame. Some people resort to power, control, and anger. Others struggle with addiction as they seek to mask the pain of the shame in their souls. Sometimes we just withdraw, feel depressed, and give up. *Who am I?* We feel a need to prove ourselves, and if we

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can't prove ourselves then we feel depressed. Do I have what it takes? It is the fundamental question of a person afflicted with shame. It is the question Moses was immediately drawn to in his conversation with God when faced with his daunting assignment.

One of the things I love about God is that even when we ask the wrong question, God often still gives the right answer. The question Moses asked—*Who am I?*—was the wrong question because he was making it too much about him. Shame always makes it too much about us. Shame is a head-down posture. Put your head down right now. All the way down to your chest. Even if you are in a room full of people, the only person you can see is you, and you have a distorted view of yourself. You don't see all of you when you put your head down; shame never gives an accurate view of ourselves even while making it too much about ourselves at the same time! Shame is an eyes-on-me disease of the soul. Shame forces us to take our eyes off God and put our eyes on ourselves. We may struggle to prove our worth by overachieving, but we are still limited to what we can accomplish, even with all of our best efforts. Shame takes our eyes off God, and it limits our spiritual authority and capacity to move mountains.

The Need for God's Presence

That is one of the fundamental problems of leadership in the church today. We are making it way too much about us: too much about our gifts, our talents, our capabilities, our plans, our programs, our strategies, our resources, and our competencies. Moses struggled in the same way. He was making it too much about him. He asked the wrong question. He shouldn't have asked, "Who am I?" He should have asked,

“Who are you?” Because, if you are going to accomplish the impossible, you need God. Only God has unlimited resources; only God has infinite wisdom; only God has unstoppable power; only God can do the impossible. But God answers Moses with the right answer anyway! He told him, “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12). This is the key to the impossible. God never gives you an assignment that you can accomplish without Him. When God gives you an assignment, God calls you into partnership. When God calls you into partnership to accomplish the impossible, God promises His presence to get the job done. Only God can do the impossible; the key to accomplishing the impossible is the presence of God. This is the key that begins to unlock a different leadership that is more biblical, less businesslike, more God-centered, less me-centered, more about His authority, and less about our human ability to make something happen. We need God’s presence to accomplish God’s assignment. When you have a God-only-possible assignment, the one indispensable need of your life is the presence of God.

Have you ever noticed that at beginning of both of the great redemptive movements of God, He appears as a fire that doesn’t consume anything? Here in the Moses story, God appears in a burning bush, but the bush does not get consumed. In the book of Acts when the Spirit is poured out on Pentecost, God appears as tongues of fire, but nothing is consumed. Why does God appear as a fire that consumes nothing? It is at least

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in part because He is showing us that He doesn’t need any fuel. He is the God who is self-sufficient, self-sustaining. All the rest of us have needs, but not God. We need Him. We need God’s presence to accomplish God’s kingdom assignments.

It is the presence of God that changes us. It is the presence of God that empowers us. It is the presence of God that enables us to change the spiritual atmosphere over a family, a church, a town, a city, a region. It is the presence of God that

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makes all the difference that we cannot make on our own, even with all of our best efforts. *The one irrepressible need of our life is the presence of God.* “I will be with you.” In essence, God is saying to Moses: “I know you feel inadequate. I know you feel like you don’t have what it takes to accomplish this impossible assignment. But I will

be with you. And that is enough.” The one irrepressible need of our life is the presence of God.

What I love about Moses is that he so internalizes this lesson that for the rest of his life his number one priority is the pursuit of the presence of God. He discovers that the one irrepressible need of his life is the presence of God, and nothing will keep him from pressing in and pressing through to the presence. In Exodus 19 the Lord calls Moses up to Mount Sinai to give him the Ten Commandments. The scene is terrifying. “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire.

The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. . . . The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up” (Exodus 19:16-20). We used to sing a song about this scene. It went something like this: “Like Moses we enter the cloud, we aren’t afraid, we aren’t afraid.” I love the song and the sentiment. But I read this scene and I think: Wait a minute. That isn’t true. As a matter of fact, Hebrews tells us Moses was trembling with fear (Hebrews 12:21). This old man was trembling in terror; his knees were knocking under his toga. He was scared witless. But he went up anyway. Why? Because he learned the one irrepressible need of his life was the presence of God. He was willing to pay any price to get there, and there is always a price for the presence of God. When it becomes less about us and more about God, we discover that we must pay the price to enter His presence and carry His presence.

Moses stayed on the mountaintop with God forty days and forty nights. Can you imagine this? At the end of their time together, a bad scene emerges. It is the golden calf incident; this is not Aaron’s finest hour. After this, the Lord makes Moses an offer: How about if I start over with you? We will wipe these people out and start over with you. Exodus 32:9, 10: “‘I have seen these people,’ the Lord said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.’” That is never an offer God has made to me as a pastor! I think there were days He might have been afraid I would take Him up on it. But Moses sought the favor of God for the people; he pleaded for the people to be saved for the sake of God’s own reputation. And the Lord relented.

Listen, I’ll let you in on a little secret. God never intended on blowing up the people. He was testing what was in the heart of His servant Moses, and what He discovered was that Moses had hung out in the Master’s presence for so long to this point that the things on the heart of the Master were now on the heart of the servant. He was being transformed by the presence of God. The things that were on the heart of the Father had now taken root in the heart of His son. Not only that, but in the beginning when faced with a terrifying calling, Moses, full of shame, asks, “Who am I?” He makes it all about him. But now Moses knows it is all about God, and God’s reputation, and God’s glory. Shame produces self-focus, making it too much about us. The presence and grace of God cure the heart of shame and break us free from self-focus. The presence of God is transformational. This time Moses asks, “What will people think about you? What will the nations say?” (Exodus 32:11-14) “‘Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’ Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”

Then the Lord, in so many words, tells Moses, “All right. I won’t blow them up. But I’m not going with you. I’ll send an angel” (see Exodus 33:2, 3). But Moses won’t relent. He has learned his lesson: the one irrepressible need of his life is the presence of God. You can’t do the impossible without the presence going before you, with you, in you. So he pleads:

“Remember that this nation is your people.” *The only thing that marks us as the people of God is the presence of God.* It isn’t going to church, it isn’t reading our Bible, it isn’t praying. It isn’t being good, trying harder, or accomplishing great things for God. It is the presence of God, and Moses has learned this lesson. The Lord promises to go with them—“My Presence will go with you”—which is really what God had wanted all along.

But Moses isn’t done here. He is gaining boldness as he is unpacking shame, and Moses presses in for even more in the thirty-third chapter of Exodus: He asks God to show him his glory. This would be an irreverent request if it came from a mere acquaintance, but this is the shamelessly audacious request of a rare but true friend of God.

And, amazingly, God grants his request.

Face to Face

In the midst of this scene a phrase emerges that is a vital understanding to this man’s enormous spiritual leadership and authority: “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). This is the man who hid his face from God at his first God-sighting, but now he has become a face-to-face friend of God. He has learned that he

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needs God above all things, and he is pressing in and pressing through to that one end.

The story goes on with Moses experiencing victories and setbacks, highs and lows. There are leadership betrayals and failures of the people and some of Moses’ own failures mixed into the chaos. The worst of them all occurs when his brother and sister rebel against him (Numbers 12). It is one thing to suffer a leadership betrayal from people under you, but when it is from your own family, that cuts to the heart. Aaron and Miriam, his own brother and sister, rebel against him. They say, “Who do you think you are? God doesn’t only speak to you. He speaks to us as well.” Right in the middle of this family dispute a phenomenal event occurs—and for the only time in the history of the Bible. God descends to earth to defend a man. There are times God defends someone in Heaven (as with Job), but this time God descends to earth to defend His friend Moses. The Lord says in his defense, “When there are prophets of the Lord among you, I reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face” (Numbers 12:6-8). God is saying: He is faithful in all my house; he is my one true, faithful friend.

Imagine! Could there be a more noble goal in all the universe than to become a true and faithful friend to God? Most translations render the last phrase I quoted as “With him I speak face to face,” and the TNIV is among them. But the actual Hebrew words have shifted. It is no longer “face to face”; it is literally “with him I speak mouth to mouth.” Moses has moved from a man who hid his face from God to a man who was a face-to-face friend with God to a man who was a mouth-to-mouth lover of God. No wonder his words carry such weight in Heaven!

A Hand Upon the Throne

There is a famous scene in Moses' life in Exodus 17. It is the scene in which Joshua is leading the Israelites into battle against the Amalekites. While Joshua is fighting in the valley below, Moses climbs to the top of a hill. "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning" (Exodus 17:11). I always picture the human realities to the biblical stories. I don't think Moses noticed exactly what was taking place right away. That's just human nature. I suspect that the old man climbs the hill, and when he reaches its peak he sees his people being overwhelmed, and he starts praying. He gets into it; he is praying with all his heart. He is on his feet, he lifts his hands with his staff of authority, and he calls out to his God. With this, he notices that the tide of the battle has begun to change.

But he is an old man and he gets tired, so he sits down for a rest. While Moses is sitting the battle shifts again and the Israelites are being whipped, and his concerns energize him once again to pray, to plead for victory. As he stands and lifts his hands with his rod of authority over his head, sure enough—the tide turns again. I think this likely happens a few times and finally Aaron or Hur notice this and say to him, "Hey, Mo, every time you stand and lift your hands we are winning, but when you rest your hands, we start to lose. You sit down on that rock over there, and we will lift up your hands over your head as you plead for the victory." And the victory came. The Amalekites were focused on Joshua and the army; they had no idea the real battle was being fought in the heavenlies on a hill by an old man in a toga. If the Amalekite leaders understood that, they would have just tried to kill the old man on

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the hill. But, like them, we often focus our attention on the earthly battles and get distracted from spiritual leadership assignments necessary for victory. At the end of the battle Moses writes down a key phrase to summarize what happened. The ESV translates the phrase this way: "A hand upon the throne of the Lord" (Exodus 17:16).

A hand upon the throne of the Lord. This is spiritual leadership.

It isn't about human capability, human resources, human ingenuity, or our best human effort. This is spiritual authority. *Spiritual authority is the capacity to touch Heaven and change the outcomes of earth.* It is the capacity to invite the presence of God to intervene and move our mountains. This isn't mere human vision, strategy, or good execution. All of those things are necessary, but in the end they can only produce what humans can produce with their best effort. If we are going to see the things only God can do, then we need to be spiritual leaders who exercise spiritual authority. We need to attend to His presence; our lives must be characterized by His presence, saturated with His presence. We must develop a face-to-face intimacy with God that allows us to touch Heaven and change earth. We need to press so deeply into His presence that we carry His presence and bring the weight of His presence to bear upon our present problems and bring God's victory to our impossibilities. We need to learn the lesson of Moses: that the one irrepressible need of our life is the presence of God, a hand upon the throne. We must learn

to touch Heaven and change the outcomes of earth. We must learn to be deeply intimate friends of God who exercise spiritual authority to change earthly outcomes.

We have focused on leadership for a long time now in the church, and yet we continue to see the statistics that fewer people are attending church than ever before in the West, and this in spite of all our best leadership efforts. Spiritual movements aren't birthed with mere human effort; spiritual movements are birthed when the presence of God comes and shifts something in the atmosphere of the heavenly realms. Spiritual movements are birthed when a spiritual leader encounters the presence of God, is marked by the power of God, and learns to touch Heaven and change the outcomes on earth. If we do what we can do, we will accomplish what we can with our human ability. If we press into His presence, touch Heaven, and change the spiritual atmosphere on earth, we can see what God can fully do. This is spiritual authority.

Spiritual authority is the ability to contend with the heavenly realities through spiritual leadership, and this affects the outcomes of the earthly realms and manifests the Kingdom of God in our midst. Spiritual authority gives us the ability to dismantle hell wherever we go. This, too often, is missing in the church. This is what I was missing in my life. I was trying to lead a spiritual movement with human leadership and human effort, and I constantly felt I didn't have what it takes. That was because I didn't. I have what it takes to lead what my gifting allows me to influence, but I can't move mountains. I can speak effectively, but I can't change human hearts. I can pray for the sick, but I can't heal human bodies. I can talk about the inviolable principles of the soul, but I cannot free one shackled soul. I was making it too much about me, just like Moses at the beginning: "Who am I?" I was asking the wrong question, and I

was left with this disquieting sense of my own inadequacy and the inevitable lid of the limitation of my resulting self-focus. I could not move the mountains before me. They stood in front of me mocking my human limitations; they stood as a monument to my human frailties. The mountains also stand as invitations to recognize the one irrepressible need of my life. The day that I closely studied the life of Moses, something inside of me shifted permanently. I realized what that one irrepressible need of my life was. I didn't merely need more knowledge or more skills, I needed to seek God's face and expand my capacity to carry His presence.

Don't get me wrong. It wasn't like I didn't pray before I had this encounter with God through Moses' life. I prayed; I spent time with God nearly every day. I prayed before we made plans seeking God's wisdom, and I prayed after we made plans. John 15 had motivated much of my approach and philosophy of ministry. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit;

I sought God for His anointing, His power, His help, His wisdom, His provision. But I also spent most of my early days of ministry seeking God's hands, not His face.

apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). I believed that. I believed I could not produce lasting spiritual fruit without abiding in Jesus. I sought God for His anointing, His power, His help, His wisdom, His provision. But I also spent most of my early days of ministry seeking God's hands, not His face.

The Moses story isn't a story of prayer; it is a story of intimacy. It isn't a story about seeking God's hands; it is a story about seeking

God's face. It isn't a story about maximizing human capacity; it's a story about carrying the presence of God to confront our impossibilities. I prayed, but not often enough like that. I sought His help, not His presence. I pursued His intervention, not intimacy with Him. I pursued God for results because I really believed I couldn't do anything apart from Him. But spiritual authority is birthed in intimacy with God, not in pursuit of God's power.

Moses didn't pursue God's hands alone; he pursued God's face. He moved from a man who hid his face to a man who pursued God's face to a man who became face-to-face friends with God to a man who became a mouth-to-mouth lover with the God of the impossible. This is what enabled Moses to touch Heaven and change earth; this intimacy was the key to his authority, and this empowered him to be used by God to move mountains. When I got that lesson that day, I realized I needed to make the pursuit of the presence of God my number one priority. Not ministry. Not fruit. Not power. Not help. Not wisdom. Not answers to prayer. Not His hands. His face. I need God. The one irreplaceable need of my life is for the presence of God. Only then can I become a man of spiritual authority. If I am ever going to break out of the prison of my human limitations, His presence is the key. If I am ever going to lay a hand upon the throne, if I am going to touch Heaven and change the outcomes on earth, I must become a face-to-face friend with God. This is the ground upon which spiritual authority emerges.

And like Moses, for many of us the thing that prevents us from this level of intimacy with God is the stuff we are carrying around in the suitcase of our souls. Things like shame. It was in my suitcase still, as it was in Moses' suitcase. It is most

It is most frequently our soul issues that keep us from our next level of intimacy with God.

frequently our soul issues that keep us from our next level of intimacy with God.

Authority Versus Authoritarian

Before I close this chapter, there is one matter I must address. We have to discuss the concept of authority because authority has a negative connotation for many people today. We live in an anti-authoritarian society in the United States. We were a country founded in rebellion. We have deep-rooted and long-held suspicions against people in positions of authority. That attitude has only grown since the 1960s. It has been further aggravated by some of the underpinnings of postmodernism. All worldviews are broken. I am not here to tear down a post-modern perspective, but like modernism and every other perspective in a sin-stained planet, it is a flawed worldview.

Postmodernism holds the philosophical belief that if there is truth, it is difficult—perhaps even impossible—to identify clearly and with any certainty. Therefore, in layman's terms, you can't know the truth with certainty, so everyone gets to define their own version of truth. The one thing that is left as an absolute is that you absolutely have no right to tell anyone that they are wrong about their choices. The one value that has risen to the top of all values in this societal worldview is the value of "tolerance." One problem with this outcome is that we have badly defined this word. We have essentially assumed that tolerance means everyone is entitled to their opinion, and all opinions are equally valid. That's not tolerance; that's just

crazy. If this were true, Hitler's viewpoints would be equal to those of Mother Teresa.

As a result of this philosophical shift we hold that anyone has a right to self-define, and that if you disagree with an individual's self-definition, you are an intolerant, bigoted, judgmental, hateful person. Therefore, I must agree with your opinion. However, if acceptance equals agreement, then diversity is a myth. We have held to the preeminence of tolerance precisely because we have wanted to be diverse, but our wrong working definition of tolerance is threatening the diversity we honor. If I must agree with you in order to accept you, then we cannot have diversity; we only have uniformity. Acceptance does not mean that we agree with everyone else.

Tolerance, true tolerance, should never demand agreement or uniformity. Tolerance means that I honor your opinions and treat you with dignity and respect. I allow you to make your choices without trying to shame you or bully you into changing. I honor your free will, and I treat you with dignity as I let you decide your way in life. But with our intense focus on tolerance, we have actually become less tolerant, and more shaming; we have become less accepting and more judgmental; we have become less unified and more polarized; we have become less peace-loving and more angry as a culture. Diversity cannot thrive in this atmosphere of misunderstood tolerance. Acceptance means that I respect

Acceptance means that I respect you and your opinions, and I value you and honor you and treat you with dignity and respect. I honor your freedom and choices.

you and your opinions, and I value you and honor you and treat you with dignity and respect. I honor your freedom and choices, but I don't have to agree with you in order to accept you.

The by-product of this system of belief is that anyone who takes a stand on a moral issue is suspect. They are seen as authoritarian. But Jesus took many stands. He was not a wishy-washy preacher who changed His opinions when the latest opinion polls were tallied. Yet Jesus valued people over opinions; He honored love above all things. Jesus was able to hang around at parties with prostitutes, and they did not feel judged because He simply loved them. He wasn't unclear about His position on sexual values, but He never wavered on His unrelenting commitment to love people. Jesus had spiritual authority but was never guilty of authoritarianism. Authoritarianism shifts into control and abuse of power; it is coercive. Spiritual authority is not that at all. True spiritual authority is not about strong opinions; it is about the ancient weighty wisdom of God cloaked in His presence and marked by His love. Spiritual authority gives a weightiness to our words, not because we are wise or angry, but because we carry His presence.

People said Jesus spoke as one who has authority and not as one of the teachers of the day. Exercising true spiritual authority is not an abuse of power. It is not about being dogmatic or opinionated. It is not about shouting down your opponent or dishonoring or disrespecting someone's viewpoints. It is not ever about shaming or controlling. True spiritual authority is a biblical concept. It flows from humility, not arrogance. It thrives in an atmosphere of grace, not judgment. It is contending against the spiritual powers and authorities in the heavenly realms. It is not a battle with people—they are not

the enemy; people are to be loved. It is established in intimacy, not in an angry conveyance of truth.

Our words carry a weightiness not because of the power of our arguments, but because of the power of God's presence in our lives. His presence gives our words an unusual weightiness. Our proclamations and actions ring true not because of our forcefulness, but because they flow from God's eternal kingdom truths embedded in God's enormous heart of grace. True spiritual authority flows out of a deep, intimate relationship with God that produces authentic revelation, and through the intimacy and revelation we carry His presence. People of authentic spiritual authority carry an unmistakable gravitas that comes without control or reliance on human forcefulness. True spiritual leaders who carry authentic spiritual authority are the most magnanimous people in the room. When we forfeit magnanimity, we forgo spiritual authority.

When we fail to operate out of the grace that allows for authority, we tend to operate out of power and control. We use the force of our opinions to win the day and control events and people. We shame people with forceful demands to control behavior. Rather than our words carrying the weightiness of His presence and revelation, we weigh people down with the force of our opinions, demands, and words. This type of leadership is not biblical, and it is not indicative of true authority. It is the leadership of the Gentile leaders, who Jesus said "lord it over" others (Matthew 20:25)—it is not the leadership of Jesus. It is the voice of religion, legalism, fear, shame, and control.

In this book I want to take a look at true spiritual authority. It is both positional and developmental. We will look at where it comes from, how to exercise it in authentic ways, and how to develop it. I want to expand upon one line I think is critical to developing spiritual authority.

*Spiritual authority is rooted in identity,
expanded in intimacy, and activated by faith.*

This was true in Moses' life. When he was fueled by shame (an identity issue), he misused power and committed murder, and then he ran and hid. Only in the presence of God did his identity get healed and rooted deeply. Only then was he able to make it less about him and more about God. This grace that cured his shame also enabled him to become the intimate friend of God. His newfound security enabled him to draw so near to God that he could lay a hand upon the throne. His security in God's love and his intimate friendship with God deepened his faith and empowered him to take faith-filled risks. It is not always true that the more we know about God, the more we trust God. But it is always true that the more we draw near to God in intimacy, the deeper our trust will grow. Moses believed God for the impossible and saw it come about. Together, as identity, intimacy, and faith were developed in Moses, his authority expanded and he touched Heaven and changed earth.

This book will build upon this statement: *Spiritual authority is rooted in identity, expanded in intimacy, and activated by faith.* Spiritual authority has changed my leadership. I am still growing in it, both in my understanding and in my practice. I am utterly convinced that spiritual authority is essential to true spiritual leadership. It was the leadership model that Jesus used and empowered His disciples to use. Let's explore it together and learn to lead with spiritual leadership and spiritual authority for the sake of God's Kingdom mission in the world today.