

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD BLACKABY

REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

*Dr. Richard Blackaby is the president of Blackaby Ministries International and has written or co-authored with his father 23 books, including *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* and *Experiencing God*. He and his wife, Lisa, make their home in Greenville, South Carolina. There has been so much—some would say too much—written on the subject of leadership during the last decade. Much of this work has influenced leadership behaviors and practices in the context of Christian organizations, but relatively little has emerged from the Christian context that has had the lasting impact of the book *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*, co-authored by Dr. Blackaby and his father, Henry. Recently, Dr. Stanley Patterson interviewed Dr. Blackaby with the hope of uncovering some of the background experiences and issues that influenced this outstanding volume. Stanley E. Patterson, Ph.D., serves as Chair of the Christian Ministry Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he teaches Christian leadership and practical ministry courses.*

STANLEY E. PATTERSON (SP): Dr. Blackaby, I want to thank you for taking time for this interview. Let's start with a bit of background on your experience and your interest in spiritual leadership. Tell us how this interest evolved in terms of you and your father collaborating on the book, *Spiritual Leadership*.

RICHARD BLACKABY (RB): I had the privilege of growing up in the home of my father and watching him lead. Especially significant, I grew up around pastors much of my life—some of the best pastors you could imagine, and some of the worst.

And so I always saw the difference that good leadership made. Amazing things happened, especially with my father. It wasn't that he had a bigger budget or a bigger church. It was just that wherever my father was serving, things just began to happen and people were motivated and excited, and God was working. So just over a decade ago, a publisher stopped by and asked my father and me what we were really

passionate about. I spoke up and shared that I was fascinated with leadership. As a young pastor, I had read all the time about leadership, studying it myself, and learning how to be a leader. Now as a seminary president, I faced the challenge of training others to be effective leaders.

And so this book was, first and foremost, a culmination of my own personal journey of striving to be the best leader that I could be. Also, it was about watching my dad in my home, seeing what a great man of God looked like, and what a great leader looked like. He has an understanding that when God is going to do a great work, He invites His people to join Him. So with my father's understanding of experiencing God, being on His agenda, and walking with God, then anything is possible. And so, coupling that with good leadership principles and teachings that we have come to learn while leading others, we put together *Spiritual Leadership*. And over the last 10 or 11 years, we have travelled—to teach it to not just pastors, but corporate leaders, educators, and parents. It has been exciting to see the same truths having practical application in all those different settings.

SP: Okay, I'd like to ask a question regarding a section of the book that I found fascinating. And that's the section dealing with the leader's vision.

In many of the leadership discussions on vision, even with Christian leaders and Christian authors, many leave God out.

You have a unique approach to explaining how vision works, and where vision comes from or finds its source. Give us a little peek into that concept of vision as you describe it in your book.

RB: Well, I think that's probably the greatest contribution that we make in that book because vision has become a real hot word in leadership circles. Everybody seems to ask, "What is your vision for the organization you lead?" Leaders are casting vision, selling their vision, and trying to get people to buy into their vision. And if you interview for a leadership position, you'll almost inevitably be asked, "What is your vision for this ministry if you decide to take it on?" So we are inundated with that discussion.

But what we realized was that in many of the leadership discussions on vision, even with Christian leaders and Christian authors, many leave God out. It starts with the leader, and it's up to the leader to develop the vision. Once it is developed, he then has to try to sell his own made-up vision to all the people he leads. Typically, when people resist the vision it is seen as opposition to his or her leadership. As such, leaders have got to get people to either buy in or get out. We've considered that to be a very man-centered approach to leadership. What we realized was that even in the famous passage in Proverbs, where the King James says, "without vision the people perish," really the better translation is, "where there is no revelation, the people are unrestrained." This means there is a huge difference between revelation and vision. We tend to think of vision as something the leader comes up with, whereas revelation is something the leader receives. Revelation is where you hear what is on God's heart and you see what God reveals.

That becomes the driving force of your leadership. You can't be the only one who sees the vision. You must help other people get into a relationship with God that allows them to hear and see the same things God is showing you. And when people get a word from God, you don't have to motivate them; you don't have to sell that. If people have an encounter with God, and they hear what is on God's heart, they'll be as excited as you are about moving forward. So we try to teach leaders to seek what is on God's heart and let Him reveal what He wants to do. That becomes your vision. That becomes what drives you. Leading this way would revolutionize much of what we see as spiritual leadership today.

When our book first came out, we had people and pastors that came to us and said, "Well, I really like that concept of moving people onto God's agenda." But then they asked, "How do you know what God's agenda is? How do you detect what God's vision is?"

What we began to realize was there were a lot of pastors and church leaders who had no idea how to hear from God. If you don't hear from God, then you have to come up with a vision yourself, because you can't recognize when God is trying to communicate His revelation to you. So all you can do is try to come up with what you think is the most appealing, grandiose, exciting, compelling vision you can come up with and hope it is big enough and exciting enough that people want to buy into it. But what is really the problem for a lot of pastors is that they don't know how to hear from God. So they have to come up with the vision themselves. And for many churches, even denominations, that's what's driving them today—what people come up with on their own, or in a committee. Then

they make a nice PowerPoint presentation and graphics, and hope that people will get excited about what they came up with.

SP: Okay, thank you. How is this model of visioning as a revelation from God interpreted in the context of what we understand as shared vision? And I know that we can be all over the board on a definition of shared vision, but describe shared vision in the sense of people who also have

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access to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Is there a shared element in the context of visioning?

RB: Well, that's a great question, and oftentimes expresses what shared vision means to many people. You have a scenario like this: If a church says, "We want to develop a shared vision," you have all the church leaders go off site for a couple of days, you pull out some whiteboards, and the pastor who is leading the session says, "Alright, everybody, what do you sense that we need to do?" And people begin to brainstorm. What do you see as the needs? What are the issues? We want to hear from you. We put all of our thinking on a whiteboard. And, of course, we always preface by opening with prayer, then we begin immediately from that point onward to put our own thinking on the whiteboard. Then at the end, we summarize it, and we put it into categories and prioritize it until everybody is comfortable with the way that we have stated our vision, print it off and give it to everybody and say, "This is our shared vision. It came from the grass roots; it came from everybody. And so we are all in this. It's a corporate vision that we developed together." That's not what I think a biblical shared vision is. If it's truly a biblical vision, it means that it came from God and He has to be the Author.

Then, basically, everybody who hears a word from God joins in embracing that vision. And so it's shared. As far as what I tell people, if you are the pastor, your assignment is not to go up on a mountain to hear from God, then excitedly come back down and tell everybody what they're to do next—let's go this way. Your assignment as a pastor is to take people up on the mountain with you, and you may have walked with God longer, you may be more sensitive to His voice, so you may hear from God sooner

than some others. You might see it sooner than some of those who go up with you, but you don't get impatient with the people. You lead the people until they're in a relationship with God in which they hear Him as well. And it becomes shared when others begin hearing from the same God who spoke to you. Then it becomes a corporately held vision because now people embrace it. And they know that it's not because they came up with it, or their pastor did, but because it's a God-inspired vision, and now the whole church has embraced it and understands it and can go forward together with a common purpose.

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SP: So it would be fair to say, then, that the spiritual journey in seeking God's voice, and His revelation in regard to His will for the church, is indeed a shared experience.

RB: Certainly. Because God cares about His people, and we are just His under-shepherds, His pastors. He loves His people. He wants His people to move from where they are to where He would have them to be. So you could ask regarding Israel escaping from Egypt and going to the Promised Land, "Was that Moses' vision, or was it a shared vision?" Well, it became a shared vision because everybody was excited about what God wanted to do for them. And so they embraced it and they all followed it. Moses was simply God's spokesperson. He probably had a closer walk with God than the average Israelite, yes, but they all were participating in the vision. They were all on the journey together. Some of the leaders were helping the people to stay on track and to keep focused on what God wanted them to do, but it was clearly a vision for all of the people together.

SP: I spent 14 years of my ministry as a pastoral supervisor. And in those years, one of the things I discovered was that pastors who left the ministry or were asked to leave the ministry rarely left it on the basis of a lack of competency. More often, they were asked to leave on the basis of character failure. You have a chapter in the book about the leader's character. What would you see as the essential element? And what is the standard that we would establish for character that sustains a spiritual leader?

RB: Well, I think there are certainly some character traits that are good for leaders to possess! I don't think there is one, necessarily, or a model that everybody follows exactly. But I think there are some aspects to character that are fundamental to a spiritual leader. Certainly humility is a huge one. I think even secular writers are recognizing that good leaders have to be humble. They can demonstrate hubris in the way they lead, and in their character, but humility makes or enables you to be teachable—you can't be an effective leader if you are not growing and learning. You are too vulnerable to blind spots, to weak spots in your character. Unless you have the humility to hear feedback, to receive criticism, to seek counsel, you will not be a successful leader. Certainly integrity is a critical part as well. People just aren't going to follow someone who is inconsistent, who says one thing and does another, or who you don't trust to be honest and forthright.

I also think courage is one of those character issues you simply have to have—courage to do the right thing—to confront sin or dysfunction, when you see it in the organization. I think some of those kinds of qualities have to be present in a leader, or you can only go so far.

SP: The second part of the question was the standard that establishes the elements of character.

RB: I think, obviously, Christ is a key standard. You watch how He relates to people. There is certainly an authority about Him, and yet also tremendous humility. How could you be the Son of God, and speak with the voice of God, and have a humility at the same time? I've always been particularly inspired by what it says in the first chapter of John. Christ came

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and He was full of grace and truth. I find most of us tend to lean toward one or the other. We either are eager to tell people the "truth" or we dispense a weakened form of grace to everyone. That allows for too much.

And I think Christ certainly is the model that you go to. Then, of course, many of the people in Scripture provide helpful models as well. Although they may not be perfect examples, you can certainly learn a lot from them.

I've always been inspired by Joshua: he doesn't have the flair of Moses; he very pragmatically gets stuff done. He trusts God and moves forward with whatever God says. And it's amazing what he is able to accomplish. The disciples, and even people like David, have some huge character failings along the way. And yet there is certainly much in David's character you

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can look at and also commend. You can clearly see that there are some aspects to a leader's character that you can learn from, either good or bad. We look at such examples and say, "here are some models that can guide us when we are trying to see what the Holy Spirit is saying as He shapes us into a leader He is pleased to use."

SP: There is a very short sentence in your book in the chapter about the leader's decision making, in which you say "mistakes do not make people failures." You mentioned David's big mistake. And some would argue that it wasn't a mistake, but rather a character failure. Regardless of that, we know that David was sustained by God, even though he went through pain with that experience. How do you translate that concept into leading people in the church who are certainly going to make mistakes? How does a leader relate to people who try and fail?

RB: Well, certainly, if you are working with people, you are going to come across some who fail. And I think sometimes leaders have to remember that, ultimately, you lead people. You don't lead an organization. You are leading individuals who are all unique, who are all highly valued by God, and your role is to try to help people become mature and complete in Christ. They are complete when they are mature and they reach their full potential in God. You will have a strong organization that accomplishes much. And I find that sometimes leaders get impatient with people and I think sometimes they forget what their job is—it is people. And particularly in the church, I think it's sad when, oftentimes, pastors will be very hard on people, pull them out of positions or berate them because they fell short. And the pastor is focused on getting the job done, getting the program humming, or the worship service perfect. And so anybody who falls short is discarded, because we think it's the production that's important, that it be done perfectly.

We tend to forget that it's really about the people. And oftentimes it

would be better to sit with some people and help walk them through their mistakes and shortcomings until, like Paul said in Colossians, they become mature in Christ one day. So, if your focus is on people and developing them, then you are going to be willing to be patient with them. Certainly, you want to see potential realized in people, and you want to see them making an effort. When you think about people like David, who certainly could have been disfellowshipped from being a king after his sin; think about Peter, who denied even knowing Christ. And yet God did not give up on them, but took them through that until they became powerful instruments in His hand. I wonder how many times the church

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has gone without some mighty giants of the faith because we discarded them along the way because of a setback they had.

And I would also add, when a person does fail, it doesn't necessarily mean that everything in that person's life is tainted exactly the same as their point of failure. And I know particularly if people suffer moral failures, it doesn't necessarily mean that you move on as if nothing has happened. I think there are consequences; sometimes people can close the doors on some activities or service for God. That doesn't mean they are not of any use to God anymore. And so I would always look at someone, I would always pray, "God, help me to see this person the way You see them. Help me to recognize the potential You see in them." And if God has not given up on someone, then certainly, I shouldn't either.

SP: Okay. We have Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 that all speak of the availability of the gifts of the Spirit. That seems to be a ubiquitous reality in the sense that everyone potentially receives a gift for ministry from God. Feel free to dispute my inference, but my question would be, Does the gift(s) that the Holy Spirit gives to each person presuppose that person has leadership responsibility in regards to that gift?

RB: That's a great question. And that question exposes perhaps a little bit of a different viewpoint my father and I would have on this subject. Certainly, in the discussion of spiritual gifts in Corinthians, it does so in the context of a discussion about the body. And there are many parts of the body, and each of them has a role to play. And whether you want to

use the term leadership or not in that context remains open to question. I haven't always seen it that way. What I've said is that every part of the body has a function. So if you are an eye, what is God going to equip you to do? He is going to equip you to see. If you are an ear, what gifting is God going to give you as an ear? He is going to gift you to hear. Why does He give you that gift? Because that is where He has placed you in the body. To accomplish the assignment that God has given you, then you're

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going to have to have a particular gifting. What I'm afraid has happened in the Christian church is that, in large part, we have focused too much on the gift, and not enough on either the Giver or the assignment.

The gifting simply follows the assignment. I think a lot of times in the church we get things backwards. That is, we want to take an inventory and figure out what our gifts are. And if I discover that I am gifted to teach, then I guess I should I go and find a place to teach, since that's how I'm gifted. But I would suggest that's all backwards. That's a backwards way of looking at that. What we need to do is relate to the Head. We need to seek Him, and relate to Him, and listen to what His assignment is for us. Whatever His assignment for us is, we know we will receive the gifting to support that calling.

But I also want to say, when you read in the beginning of Acts, when Peter preaches, and he talks about the Spirit, what he says is, "Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." I would suggest that the Holy Spirit is the gift. When you've got the Holy Spirit, you don't just have the ability to administer, or to have mercy, or any of the other gifts—you have everything that the Spirit has.

And what happens is, depending on what your assignment is, that is how the Spirit of God is going to be equipping you. So, for instance, with Moses, he doesn't take a gift inventory to figure out what he is good at doing—what God has equipped him to do. He doesn't take a gift inventory and say, "I guess I'm gifted at delivering people from bondage, or leading people." In fact, it's the exact opposite. He says, "I can't speak, I can't lead." So what does God do? "Well, I didn't ask you what your gifts were," God says. "I'm telling you what your assignment is. Your assignment is to deliver people, and be My spokesman to Pharaoh." And Moses says, "But I

don't have those gifts." And God says, "Well, I will equip you to do everything I've assigned you to do."

And so I would encourage people to let God unfold His assignment. If He tells you, "I've placed you as an eye in the body," you can count on it that the equipping to see is going to come from God. But the problem is, if you begin with yourself and what you see as your giftedness, you're looking in the wrong place. I always start with God, and I would always listen to what His assignment is and expect that He is going to equip me appropriately.

I'm also one that doesn't believe that you necessarily receive one gift, and that's your one gift for life. Because the reality is, if you look in Scripture—God gives different assignments. You may be given an assignment to teach for 10 years, and then all of a sudden you sense God leading you into a leadership role, and you say, "But, but I can't be a leader, because God gave me a gift of teaching." Well, He only equipped you to teach because that was your assignment at the time. But now, can God give you another assignment? Can He say, "Now I want you to lead," or "I want you to do something else"? If He does that, the Spirit of God, who is fully able to equip you, will then give you the gift that you need to lead.

I tell people, "Well, it's easier to take an inventory and figure out gifts than to actually develop a relationship with God where you have to recognize His voice, and hear what the assignment is He is giving you." So I do think that what it also says, in concluding this part, is that every person is in the body. So I would say, every member has a role to play. As First Corinthians teaches, some may seem more important than others,

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but every member is important. Every member has been added to the church by the Head of the body. And so every member has a role to play. And if they don't play that role, the entire body suffers. And so that's why, if I'm a pastor, what I'm going to do is to help every person understand where in the body God has placed them, so they 'll know how God is going to equip them to function, and edify the rest of the body by what they do.

SP: That's interesting, so what I hear you saying is, the gift is subordinate to the assignment. And that it is possible for the Holy Spirit to give you an assignment that may not be consistent with the first gift God gave, or another gift that you received. And that God is capable of equipping you for a new type of ministry. Is that fair to say?

RB: Yes.

A spiritual leader is someone who is guided by the Spirit of God.

SP: I would like to explore just a little in a different area. There are literally hundreds and hundreds, maybe even thousands of books written on leadership. Some are much better than others. Differentiate, if you would, spiritual leadership from what would be considered good ethical leadership in the context of say, a corporation. Is there a difference? Or does spiritual leadership fit in the corporate context outside of a service organization or a religious organization? How does that work?

RB: Well, certainly there are many, many books on leadership. And there is a whole spectrum of them. There are some secular books that will teach you leadership and they're focused in different ways. But a lot of times, what I find with many leadership books is that they are basically trying to tell the leader how, in a systematic type of way, to manipulate their people into doing what they think they ought to do. And if you have a vision, if you have a sense of what your company, your church, ought to be doing, then here is a way to get your people to do what you think they ought to do. Oftentimes it is very man-centered, human-centered, leader-centered, and it's just various tools of manipulation. There also are many books that try to take a high road—ethical leadership. Certainly in our day, with so many fallen leaders, even the secular world realizes that there has to be character and ethics and integrity and honesty in leadership. But even then, even if you are reading books about being ethical and caring about your people and so on, the issue is, they don't necessarily take God into account. A spiritual leader is someone who is guided by the Spirit of God. If you have the Spirit of God residing within you—guiding, empowering, equipping you—then you've got everything that God has available to you. Our contention is that God's presence ought to make a difference in the way you lead.

So, certainly, if you are leading a church, God's activity in your life is going to be crucial. We would also say that if you are leading a corporation, or if you are leading a secular business, having the Spirit of God guiding you is still going to make a difference, because, of course, He knows the future. And we have a number of instances where the Spirit of God guided business leaders through prayer to make some decisions that seemed brilliant when the economy hit a downturn or there was a crisis that occurred. People would say, "That sounds so brilliant, but how would you have known that?" And leaders would say, "Well, I didn't know what was going to happen, but I follow Someone who does know the future and I just sensed Him guiding me this way." And so it is also when caring about people. I know spiritual leaders who are guided by the Spirit. They testify that the Spirit knows if they've got a staff person who is hurting, if there is someone in the organization that needs to be invited out to lunch today, or to whom they should send an encouraging email.

There is a huge difference when you are guided by God, because God values things differently than we do. Of course, He values people. So if you are a spiritual leader who is following God's guiding, you are going to be a person who is making people better and building them up and helping them experience freedom in Christ. That doesn't mean you aren't going to be a good business person as well, or a good administrator, but there is certainly going to be a different dimension to your leading because you have God guiding you in a part of your leadership. Sadly,

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you'll find a lot of Christians who are very spiritual on Sunday, and throughout church, or when they are doing church business, but when they go to work on Monday, all of a sudden they don't function any differently than an atheist would. And so our contention would be, if you have the Spirit of God residing within you when you go to work in a very secular setting, God's presence ought to make a difference in what you do and how you lead.

SP: Okay, thank you. I'd like to talk to you about leadership as it differs between generations. One of the things that I notice in many denominational organizations that serve above the level of the local

church is that you often see very few young people engaged as leaders at that level. And we often lead our churches with people who are older. Do you see value in engaging young people in actual decision-making that sets the direction for leadership behavior affecting growth and accessions to the church?

They don't want to go to a bunch of meetings where adults are fighting, arguing or getting all hung up on stuff that, to them, doesn't really matter.

RB: Certainly the Millennial generation, as it's entering into the workforce and into leadership, is projected to be the largest generation ever in American history. So the church today would be foolish to not invest heavily in developing those leaders, because they will be not only the leaders of the future, they will be an extremely dominant generation in American history. So any church that wants to be impacting the days to come is going to be very intentional about engaging them.

The interesting thing about Millennials is that the vast majority of them have said, when asked, that they would be interested in having someone mentor them. We're sort of surprised at that, actually. Millennials say they really value mentoring. And again that seems to provide an enormous opportunity for the church today to ask, "Why are we not investing in people with that much potential who actually want to be mentored?" But the other thing about that is the younger generation sees some things and values some things differently than their parents did. And for them, authenticity is huge. They want you to be real. Relationships are enormous as well. I know a number of denominations have gone through some conflicts over the years debating various issues within the church. The younger generation doesn't like that. They are relational. They are peacemakers. They don't want to go to a bunch of meetings where adults are fighting, arguing, or getting all hung up on stuff that, to them, doesn't really matter.

So I think if we are going to really see how denominations or churches thrive in the future, it's going to be as we listen to this generation. We have to walk alongside them, and mentor them and invest in them. And I think one of the things that it will do for us as older adults is help us to recognize what really matters. As we try to guide the next generation, maybe we'll take our eyes off stuff that's not really crucial. And we'll start

investing in this wonderful generation and encourage and bless them with stuff that really matters. And so I think we ought to be doing more than merely putting those young people on committees or merely pulling them into our existing leadership structures. Rather, we should be church leadership in a way that actually reflects what's important to the generation that's moving into leadership and will become a very dominant generation in our society in the days to come.

SP: Thank you. The last thing that I'd like to ask you about seems to be a big issue in your book *Spiritual Leadership*. And I should confess that my first exposure to the Blackaby name was back in the mid-90s when I was given the book *Experiencing God*. I was actually asked by my employer to read it—an assignment that I courteously but reluctantly accepted. But in the reading of that book, I found myself energized with the idea that my spiritual experience could be governed around something more than just doctrine or concepts of truth, that it could be organized around a Person. So that was a gift to me.

You mentioned in *Spiritual Leadership* that we should move people onto God's agenda—this also sounds like a very personal commitment to God as our leader. Please unpack for me what is intended in that subtitle that says that the spiritual leader is responsible, or at least commissioned, to move people onto God's agenda.

RB: Well, I think you're right. In *Experiencing God* we talked about Christianity not as a religion, but as a relationship. You relate to a Person. And that transforms Christianity! Instead of being a dry set of doctrines, moral behaviors, and religious practices, it is changed into a vibrant walk with the living God. And that immediately opens up so much of the Christian life. Christianity becomes an exciting journey where God guides you to do all kinds of things that you never dreamed of doing. He will relate to you in ways that amaze you as you relate to the God of the universe.

But certainly, as that relates to leadership, there are all kinds of leadership books and theories and practices that can also sound very dry, that can sound very manipulative, apart from the activity of God in the process. If you as a leader are simply trying to manipulate your people to get a building built or to grow in numbers, or to drive the giving up, you are not leading spiritually. There is a fine line between leading and manipulating—using people in order to accomplish what you want. If you are leading, basically by following what God tells you to do, and guiding other people to relate to that same God, then all of a sudden that

becomes an amazing dynamic where you are simply bringing people into a relationship with God, and all of a sudden you experience “with God all things are possible.” When God begins to guide His people, and they do whatever God tells them to do, then suddenly you’ve got an energized people of God that see God doing things all around them.

If you haven’t experienced the power of God in your life, you’re not going to guide your people to experience the power of God themselves.

I’ve seen churches do that, where the leaders simply brought their people into a growing walk with God and suddenly things were just exploding in a positive way—all over the church. And all kinds of opportunities were unfolding and new ministries were being launched. People were energized to volunteer, to serve, not because they were buying into some leader’s vision but because they had a fresh encounter with God, and they couldn’t do enough in response to what God was doing with them. So I think for a lot of people who have been burned out on leadership, oftentimes it’s because it’s seen as administration or something. It becomes a dry, formal, necessary evil, where you’ve got to lead the people and try to get them to do the right thing, as opposed to bringing them into a relationship with God, where they hear God’s heart and are empowered by Him. That becomes a refreshing way to spend your life, helping people get into that kind of relationship.

So yes, there’s a much more exciting dimension than simply trying to organize a stiff-necked people to get a building built, or whatever else you are trying to do. Instead you are helping your people come into that relationship.

Probably the last observation is that you can’t lead people into a place that you’ve not been. Because if you have not been in a deep walk with God, you can’t lead your people into a deep walk either. If you haven’t experienced the power of God in your life, you’re not going to guide them to experience the power of God themselves. That’s why, as a spiritual leader, you’ve got to keep developing your own relationship with God. You’ve got to keep going deeper with Him yourself so that you can take your people to those places as well. And that’s really the hunger of God’s people. They will want to know God in that way if there are leaders to help them experience God in that way. So it’s incumbent on us to do everything

we can to have a rich, vibrant, growing walk with God ourselves so we can help our people to have that same experience.

SP: Dr. Blackaby, it's been wonderful to spend a few minutes with you and share these concepts. If you had just a summary or a closing word to share with our readers—and again, our journal is *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, and most of our readers are people who want to grow in the area of being responsible leaders and godly leaders—what summary statement would you make to them in counsel, or in encouragement toward becoming the type of leader God would want them to be?

RB: Well, I would encourage the reader that if you have a sense that God has called you to some kind of leadership role, that's one of the most exciting things that you can ever experience. I'll tell you as someone who has participated as a spiritual leader, and seen people grow in their faith, and grow in their confidence in God. To see people who perhaps were intimidated by the problems they faced, then to experience the privilege of guiding them into a walk with God in which they experience victory and excitement and joy makes ministry as a spiritual leader a wonderful calling.

And so I would certainly encourage people that, if God has called you that way, don't be intimidated. And don't focus on yourself, or what you perceive as your limitations or weaknesses. Keep your eyes on God. And just as He equipped Moses when he felt inadequate, or when Gideon felt inadequate, God can also take you and do amazing things in your life that you would never have dreamed of. That's the exciting reward of being a spiritual leader—that God will do things through your life to bless others far beyond what you would have imagined.

So I would certainly wish a blessing on your readers, that in the coming days, they would ask the Lord, "What fresh new thing do You want to do in my life that would be a blessing to the people around me? For my life personally, for as long as I live, I want my life to count, I want my life to make a difference." And the greatest way that your life can make a difference is to be on God's agenda personally. And then to help those around you be in God's agenda as well.

SP: I want to thank you, and maybe extend a personal request, that you would thank your father [Dr. Henry Blackaby] for the blessing that he has been to us as well, in his writings and ministry. Thank you again, and God bless.