

FORWARD

7 DISTINGUISHING MARKS FOR FUTURE LEADERS

RONNIE W. FLOYD

Ronnie Floyd has been a mentor and friend of mine for over fifteen years, I have watched and learned so much about leading and development of leaders which I use daily in my life and work as a football coach. He does a great job of clearly communicating the traits that are so valuable.

Gus Malzahn, Head Football Coach, Auburn University

In *Forward*, Ronnie expertly illustrates seven leadership characteristics that when unpacked and applied will propel your leadership to new heights and position you as a leader to accomplish more than you ever thought possible.

Donnie Smith, President and CEO, Tyson Foods

Anyone who knows Ronnie Floyd knows that he is a leader's leader. In this short but compelling piece, you get a glimpse of what makes him so effective: character, formed by confidence in God's Word; humility, shaped by the gospel; and vision, inspired by the urgency of the mission. He not only gets things done, he inspires scores of leaders to come along with him. And what better measure is there of leadership?

J.D. Greear, Ph.D., Author of *Jesus, Continued . . .*
Why the Spirit Inside You Is Better Than Jesus Beside
You and Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made
Christianity Revolutionary

Where are the leaders in the world today? What kind of leader needs to emerge in the future to lead our nation's government, schools, businesses, and churches? Ronnie Floyd answers this question in his new book *Forward*. Every leader and want to be leader needs to read this book.

Dr. Tony Evans, President, The Urban Alternative
and Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

My pastor and friend Ronnie Floyd brings to us words that affirm how we are moving forward as well as “pushing us out of the nest” in order to fly with purpose and direction. *Forward* reinforces that we are to be visionaries with our eye on the goal, not allowing us to be derailed by matters or things that take one off course. Forward is not the natural approach towards leadership but rather God's way.

Johnelle Hunt, Co-Founder, J.B. Hunt Transport

Some people talk about leadership; Ronnie Floyd exudes and exemplifies it. His new book, *Forward, 7 Distinguishing Marks for Future Leaders* provides insights from a man who is not a good observer of leadership, but a model of it. His impact on the nation as pastor of one of America's most dynamic churches as well as in his role as President of the Southern Baptist Convention is eclipsed only by the less visible, but perhaps more significant leadership as a man of personal and intense prayer and devotion. He has long

been able to balance a highly visible and public role as a national leader with the quiet and “behind the curtain” role of a humble servant of God.

Mike Huckabee, Former Governor of Arkansas
and talk show host

Dr. Ronnie Floyd is a wonderful leader and a prayer warrior whom so many admire. It’s great to see he’s taking the lessons he has learned and is passing them along to a new generation.

Roma Downey, Actress, Producer,
and President, LightWorkers Media

Insightful and powerful . . . Pastor Floyd drills straight to the heart of the issue. It is time for the emergence of a different brand of leader in this country. *Forward* provides an inspirational message of faith and vision . . . no matter what your field.

Bill Simon, President and CEO, Walmart,
US 2010–2014

Evangelical pastors and ministry directors must be committed to compelling, biblical leadership. Ronnie Floyd is a man of unparalleled experience as a leader. He has demonstrated an unswerving commitment to the Great Commission and to the type of personal integrity that characterizes good leadership. *Forward* is a tremendous resource for those who aspire to God-honoring ministry.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President of the Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

This book will help you think through leadership for a new generation, guided by one of the church's most respected and influential leaders.

Russell D. Moore, President, Southern Baptist
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

With an estimated 265 million people facing an eternity without God on this continent, the North American mission field needs the kind of forward leaders Ronnie Floyd describes in this book. Ronnie's clear, passionate call for biblically grounded, visionary leadership will prove invaluable to those—both young and old—who seek to make a gospel-sized difference in our world. But don't just read this book. Let it transform how you influence others.

Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board
of the Southern Baptist Convention

FORWARD ▶

FORWARD

7 DISTINGUISHING MARKS FOR FUTURE LEADERS

RONNIE W. FLOYD



PUBLISHING GROUP

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Copyright © 2015 by Awaken America, LLC
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

978-1-4336-8519-4

Published by B&H Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 303.3
Subject Heading: LEADERSHIP \ CHURCH \
VISIONARY

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations have been
taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman
Bible Publishers.

Also used: the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English
Standard Version®) copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles,
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
ESV® Text Edition: 2007. All rights reserved.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 • 19 18 17 16 15

Dedication

I dedicate this book to all the pastors, leaders, and churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, who have afforded me one of the greatest privileges of my life, to serve as the President of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to God for how He sustained me through this project to its completion. To Him alone, I give all the glory. I am also thankful for Jeana, my wife, who graciously observed me repeatedly with a computer in my lap or on a desk, writing this book and then proofing the manuscript. I am also very grateful to Gayla Oldham and Melissa Swain, who read through each chapter and edited them grammatically. Finally, thank you Devin Maddox and Selma Wilson for the privilege to be in this partnership with your entire team at B&H Publishing Group. May God bless all of our work and use this book to build *Forward* leaders.

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
Chapter 1: Forward Truth	9
Chapter 2: Cross-Generational	37
Chapter 3: Futuristic Thinker	63
Chapter 4: Culturally Sensitive	89
Chapter 5: Growing Teachability	119
Chapter 6: Compelled by Compassion	143
Chapter 7: Driven by Something More	167
<i>Go Forward: A Final Appeal to Future Leaders</i>	189

Introduction



Forward leaders rise to lead people to a better future.

They are able to lead people to go further than they would have ever gone on their own. Leaders like this are a rare find.

Forward leaders are missing in action. Where are they today? Where are the forward leaders who can cast a vision for a better future, inspire you to want to go there, and then lead you to experience it? Where are the forward leaders who can lead so big, they do not limit their influence by their own preferences or choices in leadership?

Leaders in the future must rise and lead people forward. They have to lead so high above the fray they will not stoop to littleness in their thinking and conduct. They have to lead so big, they will not settle for just

FORWARD

leading a few. They have to lead so deep; they will not be tossed and turned as they ride the tumultuous

Yes, I am calling for a different kind of leader to rise up for the future.

waters of leadership. Yes, I am calling for a different kind of leader to rise up for the future.

The challenge before leaders today and in the future is that our world is so filled with various “groups” or “tribes” who identify with one another around an idea or cause; they have forgotten they are a part of something bigger.

If we live in the United States, we are a part of America, not just our little nagging group that believes we have no chance for a future. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we are part of His church, not just a small group of people who may be discussing the latest Christian book or meeting around a social cause.

Forward leaders call people to rise beyond their own preferences and desires to be a part of something greater than themselves. Leaders like this are set apart from other leaders. They realize that if they spend

most of their time answering every question someone has, concern expressed, blog post written about them, or complaint verbalized, they will lead backward rather than forward.

If you plan to lead in the future in any capacity, this book is for you. It is small by design; we want you to read it, all of it, to the very end. We want you to share it with others.

Forward is about seven distinguishing marks for future leaders. Who are these future leaders? Anyone who leads anything in the future. *Forward* is a call. *Forward* is a process. *Forward* is a direction. *Forward* is a change.

Forward is about a new kind of leader who must rise up to lead in the world of today and in the world of tomorrow. What are these seven distinguishing marks for future leaders? These marks will become the marks in forward leaders.

Distinguishing Mark #1: Forward Truth

In a day when people want to define their own truth, I will challenge you to anchor your life in forward

FORWARD

truth. Understand right now that forward truth has always been true, is true, and will be true forever. Forward leaders are fastened to forward truth. When you complete this chapter, you will not be as prone to drift or end up in a ditch in your leadership.

Distinguishing Mark #2: Cross-Generational

Forward leaders are cross-generational leaders. Anyone who aspires to lead anything in the future needs to realize the following: When your leadership appeals to only one generation, you are limiting your leadership in the future. Leading cross-generationally occurs when you are able to lead people in your own generation, the generation that came before you, and the generation that comes behind you. Connecting to all generations is what forward leaders will do.

Distinguishing Mark #3: Futuristic Thinker

Forward leaders rise to lead people to a better future. They are futuristic thinkers who are always looking ahead, preparing for what could be. They are leading

people where they have never been before. Forward leaders have a faith so big; they believe God wants them to change the world. If you choose to implement what is in this chapter, no one will ever accuse you of not thinking big enough!

Distinguishing Mark #4: Culturally Sensitive

Forward leaders will set themselves apart from others because they are culturally sensitive. You will be aware of the people, their ethnicity, and practices; therefore, you will lead with sensitivity to others. Failing to do this can be very costly. This chapter will tell you what it will take for you to lead with cultural sensitivity.

Distinguishing Mark #5: Growing Teachability

The only thing that will keep you on the cutting edge in your life and leadership is your growing teachability. One of the greatest qualities of a forward leader is growing teachability. A leader who chooses not to keep growing personally will lead backward and eventually forfeit their leadership. In this chapter,

FORWARD

A leader who chooses not to keep growing personally will lead backward and eventually forfeit their leadership.

I will give you the secret to remaining teachable in your life and leadership.

Distinguishing Mark #6: Compelled by Compassion

Forward leaders are compelled by compassion. They are able to see what others see, hear what others hear, and feel what others feel. You will learn about what compassionate leadership will do for you and your leadership. The cost is high, but the return is worth it.

Distinguishing Mark #7: Driven by Something More

Forward leaders are driven by something bigger than themselves. This chapter is about what the “something more” is for every leader. Once you diagnose what it is, I will share with you how you can use your life and leadership, now and in the future, to be driven by something more. You cannot sit this one out. It is much more than a good idea; it is a movement.

INTRODUCTION

Before you get started, I have one challenge for you. If you are willing to become a forward leader, you will set yourself apart from other leaders. Your value will rise. Your reach will expand. Your influence will grow.

The time is now. The future is here. Go forward!

Chapter 1

Forward Truth

 Leaders drift. We can be ready to tie our boat to the dock, become distracted by the noise around us, and look up to find ourselves away from the dock, again. Our need was real. Our intention was good. Yet, our carelessness was costly.

Each one of us has experienced something like this in leadership. Even under the best conditions, leadership is hard. People pull at us continually. Social media screams at us. The noise is distracting. We can drift easily.

Peter Greer and Chris Horst spent two years studying organizations, including businesses, educational institutions, parachurch ministries, and churches. The result of their work is *Mission Drift*, which analyzes stories of

FORWARD

organizations who have undergone *mission drift* and those who have remained *mission true*. Examples are given where organizations were founded originally by a Christian and for Christian purposes. Today, a few are now secular.¹

At times, I drift. Years ago, I had a tendency to do it more than I do today. Oftentimes in the past, I have let my passion outrun my priorities. By the way, the need was real. My intentions were good. My carelessness was costly. When this happened, I found myself in a ditch.

There were times where my passion for relevance became so important to me, I did not think through the possible long-term ramifications. This led others to misunderstand some of what I was trying to accomplish. Looking back, I ended up in this ditch because I unintentionally permitted results to become seemingly more important than forward truth. While God used this to mature me and grow my leadership, much of it was completely avoidable. This is what happens when we drift.

Through the years, God has built within me a strong commitment to discipline. My schedule is

disciplined. My commitment to exercise is disciplined. Now, my leadership is disciplined.

I believe it is because of one reason: *I am anchored to forward truth.*

It is forward truth that has kept me out of most of the potential ditches in my life and leadership.

If you are going to rise up as a future leader, then you had better anchor yourself to forward truth. You can only lead someone to a better future if you consistently stay out of the ditches. Quite honestly, I know nothing that can lessen this threat in your life other than fastening your life to forward truth. When you do, you will set yourself apart from other leaders.

Moses Led Forward

Few leaders have ever had a more difficult assignment in leadership than Moses. People can become somewhat critical of Moses. From my perspective, *Moses was the man!*

Just imagine: he leaves luxury to embrace leadership. He did not know God's future plan for him was

FORWARD

to rise up and lead people to a better future. Right out of the gate, he ended up in a ditch! This led him to run from Pharaoh, but he could not outrun God and His plan for Moses to lead.

As God does with all future leaders, he set Moses apart with a special calling in his life. And yes, God also prepares his future leaders in all kinds of ways. God put Moses in the desert for forty years. In that setting, God prepared him to become a forward leader. Moses was certainly not perfect. No leader is perfect. I know that I am not perfect.

Moses now understood his gigantic calling in life, and even though God taught him to anchor his life and leadership to forward truth, there were moments he drifted. When he did, his carelessness cost him greatly. In fact, it cost leading the people into their Promised Land.

Yet, with intentionality, Moses led forward. His heart was set because of what God had said to him through the years. He would not let anyone move him away from his goal of leading the people forward. So many times, Moses could have ended up in

ditches filled with golden calves, whining, complaining, rebellion, and the praise of his people. Because Moses knew what God had said to him repeatedly, he developed enough balance to not end up in the same ditches as the other leaders around him. *He just kept leading forward.*

It was not Moses' leadership team that distinguished him among the others; it was the presence of God.

But Moses did not lead alone. He had a team of drifters around him who had doctoral degrees in ditches. It was not Moses' leadership team that distinguished him among the others; it was the presence of God. Not only did the presence of God guide him, the presence of God was all over him.

What Is Forward Truth?

All of this happened because over time God had mentored Moses in forward truth. And because of this, Moses just kept leading forward. Again and

FORWARD

again, he rallied people to a better future. This is what forward leaders do.

The most important distinguishing mark for future leaders is forward truth. So what is forward truth? It is:

Biblically Based

Forward leaders are fastened to forward truth. There is no truth apart from God's truth. God's truth is eternal. It has always been true, is true, and will be true forever. Anything else is just not truth. It comes and goes. The Scripture says in Isaiah 40:8,

“The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.”

When Moses saw that burning bush and later met with God on the mountain, he encountered the One who is, who was, and who is to come. He met God and heard Him speak personally.

Forward truth is eternal truth. It was this kind of truth that kept Moses leading forward. It will be

forward truth—eternal truth—that keeps you leading forward.

As a future leader, you will lead from some personal frame of reference or from some source of authority. It may be from your personal experience, your family heritage, your academic preparation, or something else. But if you lead from one of these, you are destined for a ditch.

I want to call upon you to embrace forward truth. Forward truth is the only truth that will lead you to the future successfully. Forward truth is not new truth but eternal truth. For Moses, it was God's voice, His personal word. For us, it is the Bible, God's Word for us personally.

Forward leaders are anchored to forward truth. The Scripture says this in 2 Timothy 3:16–17,

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

FORWARD

This means that each Scripture in the Bible is inspired. In other words, God Himself has breathed the Scriptures into reality. Just as He spoke to Moses, He speaks to us now through the Scripture.

When future leaders base their life and leadership on the Bible, it gives them an advantage. It will benefit you to be a man or woman of the Bible. Immerse yourself in what God instructs through the Scriptures. When He speaks, He is right. Always. There are times when the Bible convicts you of sin and wrongness. At other times, it corrects you, nurturing you to restoration and completeness. It always helps you to think purely and operate with integrity. Nothing, and I mean nothing, not one book, including the one you are reading, can get you ready for your future like the Bible.

My life and leadership is anchored to the Bible. I believe in biblical inerrancy. I believe God inspired the Scripture; therefore, it is entirely true, authoritative, and trustworthy. It is God's Truth without error. As Albert Mohler writes:

The affirmation of biblical inerrancy means nothing more, and nothing less, than this: When the Bible speaks, God speaks.²

Each time I open the Scripture, God is speaking to me.

One of the great champions for biblical inerrancy is Paige Patterson. In an article about a message he preached to his students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, on the inerrancy of Scripture, it is written:

Patterson said the Bible is inerrant, with no mistakes of any kind; infallible, leading not its readers to any error; plenary, being equally inspired of God in its totality; and verbal, having inspiration in every single word and syllable, not just the ideas.³

Herein, I stand.

Forward leaders base their life and leadership on the Bible. I promise you, it is more reliable than any book, blog, article, or conference you will ever

FORWARD

attend on leadership or the future. What God says, He means. What God promises, He does.

Wall Street does not have the final word. Washington does not have the final word. Cancer does not have the final word. Death does not have the final word. God has the final word. This is why we must base our lives and leadership in the Bible.

Theologically Balanced

What resources do leaders have at their disposal? Capital. Broadly speaking, a leader has three kinds of capital to deploy to get things done. *Economic* capital is money. *Social* capital is who one knows; the number of people one knows matters some, but for getting things done, certain friends have more authority and influence than others. *Cultural* capital is a blend of achievement, credentials, experience, and ease in particular circles of people. Social and cultural capital depend on trust. All of these forms of capital can be acquired and deployed, but none are infinite and all can be depleted or destroyed.

It's easy to understand what happens when a leader overspends his economic capital. Likewise, a leader can fritter away his or her social and cultural capital by spending them on the good things that are not the best things. A forward leader knows he can't fix every problem or respond to every crisis. He keeps his powder dry so he has ammunition for the most important initiatives or for the most important crises. I know that the best-selling author Stephen Covey is a Mormon, but his principle "Putting First Things First" is helpful here. He writes, "But you have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, non-apologetically—to say 'no' to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger 'yes' burning inside. The enemy of the 'best' is often the good."⁴

The point: Not every theological issue merits your economic, social, and cultural capital. Choose wisely where to use your capital for the right initiatives and for the right crises.

One of the most influential Christian leaders in modern times and in the history of the church is

FORWARD

Billy Graham. God raised this man up to influence world leaders. He served as a spiritual advisor to many presidents of the United States of America, regardless of their political persuasions or personal lifestyles. In his most productive years of ministry, Billy Graham was able to influence people who walk in various spheres from political, cultural, religious, social, and economic. He was able to cross barriers and influence people from all walks of life.

Why was Billy Graham able to do this? He refused to get drawn into various matters that would limit his influence or sideline him from reaching the world for Jesus Christ. While having deep theological convictions and even personal political views, he gave his life to one thing: *making the gospel known to all people on the planet.*

Billy Graham refused to be misled or influenced into many of the theological ditches of his day. He focused on Jesus and His good news for the entire world. His life and ministry is a model for future leaders.

As leaders of the future we have to stand on the Bible. Even though we may be considered weird in our culture, we need to discipline ourselves to stay focused on the main message of Jesus Christ. When we need to address specific cultural issues, I am not suggesting we avoid them; but I am suggesting as the Lord opens the door, we always address them by offering the hope of the gospel. If we do not, we will be in a different ditch every month of the year. Our influence will become limited and perhaps even lost.

The need for theological balance is not something new. The apostle Paul called for balance and the avoidance of extremism in 1 Timothy 1:3–4. It says,

that you may instruct . . . not to teach different doctrine or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God's plan, which operates by faith.

The call was not to run away from addressing the false teaching of his day; it was a warning not to get so caught up in false teaching that it will lead you

FORWARD

away from God's ultimate plan, which is redeeming the world.

We cannot lead forward when we are in continual debates over secondary matters. Forward leaders have to stay on the high road, focused on the plan of God for the world.

The great Christian leader, Paul, was a forward leader. He built his life on forward truth, the eternal truth of God. He was more than willing to confront people when the gospel was being demeaned. Yet, he called upon Christ-followers to refuse to get themselves into arguments that were meaningless. He issues a strong challenge recorded in 2 Timothy 2:16. It says,

But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this
will produce an even greater measure of
godlessness.

In a very strong way, the Bible itself calls us to stay away from discussions that can lead us into the appearance, attitude, or portrayal of godlessness to others.

If Satan cannot get you to do the wrong thing, he will get you to do the right thing in the wrong way.

This often leads to losing our testimony and influence upon the very people we are trying to reach. Leading forward means that you are leading people toward God, not away from Him.

Perhaps the clearest call to avoid theological extremism is recorded in Titus 3:9. It says,

But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

While we may not know the specifics of some of these discussions, what we do know is that the threat was so great to lose their focus on the gospel, they were called upon to refuse to get into foolish and needless controversy. The call was to avoid fighting, even about matters of the law, because they would end up in useless discussions.

The Christian life is not about trying to win the arguments in our culture or having the final word in the debate. Forward leaders have to be bigger than this and refuse to be drawn into these kinds of matters. Leaders in the future world do not have to

FORWARD

compromise the Bible or its deep truths. What we have to do is discipline ourselves to keep the gospel central, and our mission in the world clear. We have to be able to sort out the most urgent and important theological issues.

What we have to do is discipline ourselves to keep the gospel central, and our mission in the world clear.

One of the clearest illustrations of how to do this is given by Albert Mohler in his article, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity.” Since he is also a personal friend, I have heard him talk about this on a few occasions and each time I hear him, I am intrigued. He uses the illustration of an Emergency Room in a hospital that practices the discipline of triage. This is when a medical professional is given the authority to determine quickly through evaluation the level of each person’s need physically; therefore, the most urgent case is dealt with first.

Mohler writes that this is what we need to practice theologically. He calls it theological triage. In fact, in

his article, he defines three different levels of theological issues. Using his illustration of triage, he writes the following about the most important, urgent, first-level issues:

First-level theological issues would include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith. Included among these most crucial doctrines would be doctrines such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.⁵

I could not say it better!

He goes on to share about the second-level issues, like congregational or denominational forms, Christian baptism, or something like the ordination of women into ministry. Mohler acknowledges it is at this level that Christians seem to be most passionate. He then moves on to share about the third-level issues like the timetable of the Lord's return. While we may agree on the truth that Jesus will return, there are often debates over the timetable of His return.

FORWARD

I am appreciative of this call for theological triage, because it is linked with spiritual maturity. As we grow in what it means to be forward leaders, we do not need to lose fellowship with others over matters that are important but not the most urgent. Albert Mohler is not calling for compromise, but he is calling us to take the Bible very seriously. Yet, we certainly have to become mature enough in the Lord to not elevate all issues as first-level theological issues, nor de-elevate first-level issues. This is why we must keep the gospel central and God's mission in the world as our priority. This can only happen when we are theologically balanced. Otherwise, I will find myself in a different ditch each month. People come to leaders continually about their concerns, issues, or causes, wanting us to join their concern, issue, or cause. Perhaps a few are worthy to consider, but it is difficult to determine which are worthy if we aren't theologically balanced.

I can assure you, in my earlier years of leadership, I was so vigilant in the fight that, at times, I fought without wisdom and balance. I have found myself in so many ditches, defending this, promoting that, or

chasing after the approval of others, trying to meet their expectations of me. While all of this was happening “for the cause,” I noticed my influence was decreasing.

Back in the 1990s, evangelicals were in a fight for what we believed was the soul of our nation. Things were beginning to slide away from what we believed was our history; therefore, many spiritual leaders engaged in these battles intensely. As a much younger leader at that time, I did not always practice discernment on what to engage and what to let go. I was very zealous and often did not exhibit using the right tone in my desire to defend what I believed was truth. I felt the pressure of others upon me. At times, I noticed, I had lost my equilibrium as a leader.

I know from personal experience that you cannot let the passion of someone else distract you from God’s priority. If we are not careful, we will chase after everything but Jesus Christ. If we are not discerning, we will become so “ditch-driven” in our leadership that our influence for Christ will continually decrease. Rather than holding the Bible up, declaring that Jesus

FORWARD

is the hope for the world, we will be holding up signs, banners, views, or books about things that may be good, but they are not best.

President Abraham Lincoln faced a gut-wrenching choice in the early months of his administration. By conviction, he believed slavery to be immoral. He desired that it not spread and that it eventually die out. A sizable portion of the voters who put him in office passionately believed the same thing: oppose slavery's spread and eventually eradicate it. But Lincoln put this enormously important goal on the back burner so that he could spend his capital on saving the Union first. If he didn't preserve the Union, he and his successors would lack the authority to contain and eradicate slavery. Had Lincoln submitted to critics and powerful leaders demanding the immediate abolition of slavery, border states almost certainly would have joined the Confederacy and the Union would not have survived. By staying focused on the forward truth of preserving the Union first, President Lincoln was able to do both—save the United States and abolish slavery.

Leading forward calls us to base our lives and leadership in the Bible and staying balanced theologically. Yet, there is still one more necessity we need as forward leaders.

Spirit-Led

When Moses had God's Word in his heart that was spoken to him on the mountain, he refused to get drawn into the same ditches with the very people he led. He did not want to have anything to do with their whining, complaining, rebellion, or even their golden calf. As he had to just keep leading forward, he was following the guidance of God.

God assured Moses of the following, written in Exodus 33:14, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Moses told God that if He did not go with the people, not to make them go forward.

Moses asked God a penetrating question, and followed it up with a brilliant observation. It is written in Exodus 33:15–16,

"If Your presence does not go," Moses responded to Him, "don't make us go up

FORWARD

from here. How will it be known that I and Your people have found favor in Your sight unless You go with us? I and Your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth.”

Moses knew that there was only one thing that distinguished them from other people. He knew there was only one thing that set him apart as a leader and the people as the people of God. What was it?

It was the presence of God. God’s favor is His presence. Moses knew that as he led the people forward, he needed the presence of God. He and the people needed to be led by the Holy Spirit. They got to this point because of His presence and could only enter into the Promised Land with His presence leading and abiding with them.

Forward leaders are only distinguished from others when they are led by the Holy Spirit. Even though brilliance, discipline, charisma, and a great smile are friends to a leader, it is only the presence of God that ultimately sets you apart.

“If I don’t have Your presence, I will not go without You,” was Moses’ conviction. Is it yours? Are you convicted and convinced that His presence is so imperative to success in the future that you declare the same words Moses did as recorded in Exodus 33:18, when he said, “Please, let me see Your glory”?

Forward leaders must see as Moses did. You cannot lead anyone anywhere meaningful in the future without the presence of God. *Forward lead-*

ers need to be Spirit-led! The Spirit always points us to Jesus Christ; therefore, He helps us stay based in the Bible and balanced theologically. He never leads us away from the Word of God, but always leads us to the Word of God, the Bible.

Just as the Holy Spirit led Moses to make sense of the forces and challenges around him, the Holy Spirit can lead us and help us make sense of the forces and challenges in our day. Moses had enemies behind,

Even though brilliance, discipline, charisma, and a great smile are friends to a leader, it is only the presence of God that ultimately sets you apart.

FORWARD

ahead, and all around as he led the people of Israel out of Egypt, into the wilderness, and ultimately to the edge of Canaan.

In our time in the United States, and the West broadly, the church faces challenges all around. The comfort, prestige, and privilege that Christians enjoyed in “Christendom,” when for 300 years it was the widespread social norm to attend church, believe in Jesus Christ, get married and stay married, and rear one’s children in the church—that era is past. In our current post-Christendom era, committed activists have ruptured almost everything that was settled in society. Debatable matters are now decided contrary to the Bible, and previously unthinkable matters are now debated.

What kind of leader can succeed in this era of bewildering upheaval? Only the leader who is Spirit-led can navigate cultural churn and lead people forward. Without God’s presence, leaders will run aground on any number of rocks. But with God’s presence, the forward leader will skillfully journey to God’s appointed destination.

The Time Is Now

The time is now for us to come together in visible union. We cannot do that without an explicit agreement on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4,

For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the only hope for the world. Jesus died for our sins. He was buried because He was dead. Yet, on the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. This is the only hope for the world. It is our only hope. Once we receive it, we must pass it on to others.

Forward leaders stay focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ and present it as the only hope for the world. Therefore, since this is “most important” as stated in the above text, we need to treat it as most important every day.

FORWARD

This is why the time is now for future leaders to desire forward leadership. It is time to anchor our lives in forward truth, which is the only truth that existed in the past, the only truth that exists today, and the only truth that will exist for the future, even throughout eternity. When we do this, we will not drift in our lives and leadership. How do we ensure this as forward leaders?

▶▶▶ **Forward Actions**

1. Be Bible-based in your life and leadership. Refuse to drift away from its authority and influence for your life.
2. Be theologically balanced in your life and leadership. Refuse to end up in a ditch!
3. Be Spirit-led in your life and leadership. Refuse to believe anything else will set you apart as a leader.

Notes

1. Peter Greer and Chris Horst, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House), 23–25.

2. R. Albert Mohler Jr., “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy”, excerpted from *Five Views of Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

3. Paige Patterson, “Patterson Delivers Sermon on Inerrancy of Scripture,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 8, 2013.

4. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 157.

5. R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” AlbertMohler.com, July 12, 2005.