



THE **RIGHT-SIDE UP** LEADER

CHOOSING
HEALTH
IN THE AGE
OF IMPACT

ALAN BRIGGS

The Right-Side Up Leader

Choosing Health in the age of Impact

Alan Briggs

"I'm a big fan of Alan Briggs. This content is gold! Very timely, immensely practical and much needed. You will be blessed and challenged."

Daniel Fusco, Pastor of Crossroads Community Church,
Author of *"Upward, Inward, Outward"* & *"Honestly"*

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Who turned us upside down?

Many priests and ministers today increasingly perceive themselves as having very little impact. They are very busy, but they do not see much change.

Henri Nouwen

I immediately felt sick to my stomach. Another messy issue with a church leader flooded my social media feed. It was smeared all over major media networks. Another black eye for the Church. I read the comments below the article and cringed. I thought of the pain the leader, the family and the church must've been going through.

Over the next few weeks I cracked open honest conversations about this situation with half a dozen pastors. Every conversation seemed to echo the same thing; something is systemically wrong. Something is missing. Something is awry. Christian leaders are crumbling while popular culture points and laughs. It stings a little worse each time.

A few months later I sat in a cold plastic chair preparing to speak to a room full of pastors. My eyes bounced around the room as pastors filled the chairs. They limped into the room visibly marked with stress. They dragged heavy burdens that bent the floor beneath them. A few leaders paced in the back as they talked "business" to leaders back home. Others were glued to their screens banging away at sermons and emails. Others col-

lapsed into chairs, their bodies threadbare and aching for a break. Many showed obvious patterns of fast food lunches and forgone exercise sessions, probably in the name of gospel work. The room was absent of smiles and laughter.

If I were a young leader on the brink of discerning a pastoral call I would take one look at this room of pastors and run. I wouldn't sign up for that. Not today, not ever.

Both scenarios replay frequently in my mind. The first one more blatant, the second one more subtle. Both are glaring markers that something has gone terribly wrong. We've lost our way. Perhaps we've been distracted by good things and abandoned the best things. Perhaps we've taken our eyes off the prize. Perhaps we have no grid for anything different than weathered souls and tired bodies.

What's your burnout plan?

If you were going to burn out how would you do it? Every time I ask leaders this question it knocks them off balance like a right hook to the jaw. After a quick stumble they usually tease out an answer. Occasionally leaders tell me, "More of what I'm doing now." I follow the rabbit hole. I ask, "If nothing changes how long do you have before you burn out?" I get concerned with anything less than six months. I've never met a leader who set out to burn out. No one dreams of accomplishing a few milestones and flaming out. We don't land there on purpose.

Early in my days as a pastor I nearly burned out. By the grace of God He met me in that season. He gave me a bigger perspective, helped me zoom out and get a wide angle view of the topography of my soul. He reminded me of his role and his kingdom and my fragility and my needs.

Our world is flipped upside down. Onramps to burnout are everywhere. In fact, most roads naturally end up there. We are laughing less and stressing more. We live in what Tim Keller calls “the anxious age”, and kingdom leaders are as anxious as anyone else. We preach rest, limits and sabbath yet many of us live devoid of them.

Psalm 127 says,

*Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil...*

Psalm 127:1-2

This is a snapshot of the internal life of most ministry leaders today. It sounds all too familiar. Late to bed and early to rise. Stressful work. Desperately longing for rest. I’ve lived there too. Perhaps you’re in that season right now, and it’s grinding your heart into a fine powder. Most ministry leaders I know perpetu-

ally live in this state of stress and exhaustion. The Psalmist calls it “anxious toil”.

We didn’t land on these anxious shores overnight. We’ve been angled a few degrees off course for a long time. Occasionally a Christian leadership tale gone wrong earns a spot on the evening news, but most of the time it won’t. It’s a long drift. When we look systemically at ministry leaders there’s a small hole in the bottom of the boat, and we are slowly drowning in a health epidemic. Our hearts, souls, minds, bodies and families are paying the price. Unfortunately we’re on pace with the culture, no noticeable differences.

Toxins and deficiencies

Dr. Stephen Cabral and his associates have assessed over 250,000 patients. That’s a decent sized city. They’ve experienced an amazing success rate in getting people from unhealthy to healthy. His whole strategy; *remove the toxins and add the deficiencies.*ⁱ

That’s a great way to think about leader health. We have toxins running through our leadership bloodstreams. Constantly monitoring our inboxes, overworking, trying to get ahead and inconsistent rest patterns leave us stressed and perma-tired. We have deficiencies ranging from mild cases of sabbath skipping to diseases of trying to earn God’s affection through production. We have too much of some things and not enough of others.

*We are full of toxic stress and striving.
We are deficient in rest and abiding.*

Striving and stress aren't God's intention for his sheep or his shepherds. Luckily this snapshot in Psalm 127 doesn't end with a cold meal of anxiety. It continues with this invitation; *"for he gives to his beloved sleep."*ⁱⁱ Just as God rested after sculpting the mountains and painting the skies He invites us to rest. God didn't get tired at the end of the week and need a day off, but He knew we would.

This invitation to rest begins with refusal. As kingdom leaders we must refuse to continue chanting the cultural anthems of stress, striving, fear and white-knuckle leadership. At some point our lives must declare: *ministry will not win at the cost of my heart, soul, mind, body and family.*

Jesus promised abundant life. Kingdom leaders are yearning to experience that. Perhaps we're on the edge of a health revolution. When leaders and teams get healthy it's contagious. I dream of a day when a room of Christian leaders are a picture of freedom and life. Yeah, that life spilling over the brim Jesus talked about.

Imitation is at the core of discipleship. For good or for ill we are exemplars. People are watching our lives as they calibrate theirs. Our habits, pace, rhythms and rest are contagious. Is that a good thing?

Do a quick and honest self assessment with these questions.

Would it be a good thing if those you lead lived like you do?

What areas of your life are worth imitating?

What areas of your life should be avoided?

What does right-side up feel like?

You are responsible for your own health

Kay Warren, Co-Founder of Saddleback Church

"I want to grow up and be healthy someday", said no twenty one year-old ever. As a young leader in the ministry arena I wanted to do exciting things for God. I dreamt of being innovative, pushing the limits and crushing it in the name of Jesus. That dream expired as I watched leaders chasing impact at the expense of their own souls. I smelled the unhealth in it. Now I want to grow up and be healthy. I desire impact that flows from stewarding, not striving. I used to want to hang out with impressive people, but now I want to hang out with healthy people.

I get the privilege of coaching kingdom leaders and consulting with organizations about reaching impact. This has given me a unique vantage to see backstage in leaders lives. I've observed a trend floating to the surface.

Pursue impact and you'll find unhealth.

Pursue health and you'll find impact.

I call this "the leadership conundrum." It's a catch twenty two. We want to experience impact, but when we run recklessly at impact it slips through our fingers like sand. Look at the backward picture of impact the Apostle Paul paints in Ephesians.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

First comes the workmanship, later comes the works. Let's break this down.

Workmanship first. We are God's poem, his craft, his masterpiece. This is a picture of our identity and the intention with which our Father designed us. If we lose sight of this we'll become insecure leaders. This can be deadly. Insecure leaders chase validation through production. Our good works will flow from striving with the hope of earning. We already have validation! Our identity as sons and daughters of the king is our foundation for ministry. We already have his approval.

Works later. God has good works waiting for us. God doesn't need us, but He chooses to use us. In his upside-down plan He invites us to join his work. We have good works waiting for us. The work is an invitation to uniqueness as we collaborate with work God is already doing.

*Workmanship before works.
Identity before impact.*

When we mix up the order it always gets weird. We will begin seeking something that work was never designed to offer. God has wired every human for impact, but we often build our leadership structures on swampy foundations. Our cultural narrative entices us to chase impact in search of identity. Running at impact with complete abandon breeds unhealth as surely as elementary schools breed the flu. Our culture celebrates impact at all costs. We receive awards for working hard and doing anything needed to claw our way to success.

The right-side up leader chooses health over impact. The gospel reminds us we already have identity, and we get to go with our Father and find impact. Here's the irony; *right-side up leaders still find impact on the other side of health.*

Zoom out

I often find myself in a new city glancing between the road and the upcoming turns on my phone. Sometimes the map freezes, and I am left with no clue which way to turn. In that moment I realize I have no real understanding of where I am. I zoom out to find my location in the context of the greater city. As kingdom leaders we need to make the choice to zoom out often. Zooming out should always bring us back to our identity. If you want to last as a leader you're going to have to lift your eyes from the decisions of the moment to ask, *"What does long-term health look like for me?"*

We must learn to rest in our identity as sons and daughters. That's the first step toward longevity and healthy leadership.

This practice realigns our hearts amidst the chaos of our schedules. In his classic *The War of Art* Steven Pressfield describes the healthy leader, "He eliminates the chaos from his world in order to banish it from his mind."ⁱⁱⁱ Most leaders I spend time with live in a perpetual state of chaos sprinting to the next meeting, deadline and season. Are you eliminating the chaos in your life or producing more of it around you? Perhaps you need to pull over, zoom out and get the bigger picture of where you are.

Ironically, as your life gets healthier you'll experience more victories. When the inputs are healthy the outputs yield more impact. You'll watch the quality and quantity of your leadership rise. With some focus tiny seeds of health will sprout through the cracks in our leadership budding into fruit trees.

Ask yourself these questions

Where are you chasing works before workmanship?

Where are you chasing impact before identity?

What are a few practical things you can do to reverse these?

What is the countercultural invitation?

*Sabbath is when we get our hearing back,
our feeling back, our seeing back*

Daniel Grothe

For twelve months I met with a wildly creative guy nearly every week. He was confident, multi-talented, and charismatic. He was starting a church, so I got to peek behind the curtain of his life. Every Monday he seemed tired and unfulfilled from the weekend.

One day I asked him, *"What would a perfect weekend look like to you?"* Deer in the headlights. He had no grid. Rest was a good idea to him, not a reality. This caught up with him after a season of pushing hard in a full-time job while training a church startup team. The problem was not his job or his team; he never let himself rest. He had no sabbath. He didn't realize his limits. He started every week on empty. The fresh ideas dried up, and he didn't have a process to continue creating and impacting others. This story is all too common.

Understanding your limits helps you manage your energy. You're only human. If you neglect your needs and violate your limits your creativity will dissipate. Your health will fall apart. You will come face-to-face with "the B word" we all fear: *burnout*. In order to accomplish big things you need to establish boundaries and stay healthy. If you want to produce more, you'll have

to be content doing less. You need to find a rhythm where you can work hard and rest right. Look at the creation narrative.

*On the seventh day he rested from all his work.
God blessed the seventh day. He made it a Holy Day
Because on that day he rested from his work,
all the creating God had done.*

Genesis 2:2-3, *The Message*

God set this example of intentional rest for us to follow. You can't effectively continue creating without ceasing. The irony of production is it requires rest, limits, boundaries and focus. Sadly, most leaders I meet are unhealthy.

*We want to cultivate beauty, but we don't want to be cultivated.
We want to shape healthy organizations, but we aren't healthy.
We want outward transformation without inward formation.
We want impact without health.*

Energy Management Equation

Prolific + Brilliant – Healthy = Burnout

I'm convinced most pastors are living on adrenaline and caffeine. I'm a big fan of coffee, but caffeine and adrenaline have become crutches in a few seasons of my life. Instead of getting rest I supplemented with enough caffeine to power a herd of elephants throughout my day. This incessant pushing also kept

the adrenaline flowing. These drugs are legal in every state and culturally acceptable, but they're blanketing the real issues below. Instead of receiving God's beautiful invitation into rest we accept our culture's enticing invitation into constant production.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is go to bed or take a day off. When we choose sabbath we remind ourselves God is doing just fine spinning the world on his finger. Turns out He doesn't need us. I wonder how many pastors who tell burnout stories simply experienced the breakdown of their body or mind. The tank was empty. I wonder how a simple sabbath rhythm could save thousands of leaders from burnout.

Practical theology

How's your theology? Stay with me here. We read thick books and talk a good theological game, but we live a poor theological narrative. What we say about God, our stated theology, inhabits pulpits and Bible studies, but our practical theology inhabits the cracks of our lives. Our practical theology has gaps, sometimes chasms. We preach sabbath and margin and God doing the work, but we work ourselves to the bone living like it depends on us. It's God's work, and we join in.

Sabbath is a choice. Every time I choose sabbath I'm professing, *"God can do this on his own. God can run the world without me. He's in charge, I'm not. When I rest God is still working."* A funny thing happens when I make this choice; I become convinced of how big God is and how little I am.

Sabbath invites me to attend to my needs. My wife and I have deep conversations reminding me how much I craved it. I experience deep sleep and realize how much I needed it. I read an entertaining book over a slow cup of coffee. I go to the park with my kids and notice how precious they are. I push through fear, and hit the pause button on work. Emails sit motionless in my inbox and task lists sit neglected on my desk. I laugh and eat and drink and savor and accept the invitation to be a mere human. I pick up my fly rod or jump on my mountain bike. I ask my kids questions I didn't get around to asking all week. My tank re-fills. I remember what matters and why it matters. God reminds me of my neediness.

Sabbath is a gift ready to be unwrapped. But it's our choice to open it up. You'll have to make hard decisions. The work will patiently wait until Monday. Ironically, when we choose rest we get excited to work with purpose again. When we rest from work we experience the joy of working from rest. Sabbath quietly declares civil war against our high-producing culture. It reminds me our culture is upside-down, and I yearn to live right-side up.

Crashing isn't resting.^{iv} Our culture doesn't rest; it crashes. Rest is proactive advance, crashing is reactive retreat. We've all experienced "the crash". Maybe you do this every day. A rhythm of crashing will flood your adrenal system as it empties your tank. Put it this way; you're going to stop at some point. You've got two choices; enter the path of intentional rest or let your body crash and force you to stop. We've all heard the stories of heart attacks, and mental breakdown. I also meet with leaders experi-

encing a steady loss of abundant life. Sabbath is proactive; it's also obedient.

Work followed by rest is the healthy rhythm of anything that's alive. If you want to keep producing you must rest and replenish. Even the ground ceases to produce crops if you don't rest it and let the nutrients return to it. Yet we think we can beat the odds, play the game, come out on top. Good luck with that.

Want to go the distance? Establish a sabbath where you cease producing. Then you've gotta stick to it. Resting one day a week might provide more fuel for creativity than striving the other six.

Rest from work; action steps for your sabbath rhythms

- Establish your weekly sabbath day
- Talk to your spouse, and write it in your calendar
- Let your team know you won't be available that day
- Define what sabbath will include for you
- Define what you will avoid on your sabbath
- Decide how you will approach screens on your sabbath

Work from rest; action steps for your weekly rhythms

Make a list of your weekly needs in the following areas...

Rest:

Spiritual practices:

Play:

Relationships:

Exercise:

Learning:

What is the good life?

You can't think your way into new hungers

James K.A. Smith

"What is the good life for you and your family?" I love asking people this question.^v It helps us zoom out and get a bigger perspective. The answers to this question usually land in three different categories; *fulfillment*, *play* and *relationships*. These are three areas we need to be paying attention to as humans and as leaders.

Fulfillment; crushing the hollow chocolate bunny

One Easter my parents gave me a massive chocolate bunny wrapped in gold and purple foil. After staring at it for a few long minutes I removed it from the box and unwrapped the mouth-watering gut bomb. Instead of a mouthful of sweet chocolaty goodness it cracked in half and crumbled in my mouth. It was hollow.

Chasing impact through production is a hollow chocolate bunny. We imagine deeply fulfilling accomplishments so full we'll eat off them for weeks. Once the event, project or season is over we're less fulfilled than we were before. The bunny cracks. Impact for the sake of impact is terribly hollow.

We are built for meaningful work, but we despise toil. The difference between work and toil is meaning. Chasing impact be-

fore securing our identity lacks meaning. Impact frenzy is a hollow chocolate bunny you simply must crush. It will leave you frantic and unfulfilled. It turns meaningful work into toil. We have become obsessed with the fruit of the tree without tending to the roots. You feed the tree by feeding the roots. When fruit trees are healthy they grow fruit. That's what they're built for.

Ask this: *What brings you a sense of fulfillment? Why?*

Play; fly rods, car shows and art galleries

Most ministry leaders I meet are good at learning, but terrible at playing. Amidst the rigors of ministry we better learn to play, to have fun, to find a hobby. I don't care if it's fly fishing, going to car shows or browsing art galleries. Just find one that refills your tank. Hobbies remind us how much we need play. The weight we carry as ministry leaders can rob us of joy if we let it. Hobbies help us connect with people as we recharge our batteries.

Here is a list of different types of hobbies.

Tangible Hobbies. As spiritual leaders we rarely get to accomplish something tangible. Working with our hands in wood working, landscaping, painting or gardening can be satisfying.

Adventurous Hobbies. Rock climbing, water skiing, mountain biking or hunting can all provide healthy opportunities for the sense of adventure we long for. They help us find adrenaline rushes in healthy ways.

Creative Hobbies. We all have an artistic heart, even if it's been buried for a while. It's never too late to experiment with photography, painting, songwriting or smoking brisket.

Athletic Hobbies. A hobby that keeps you in shape can be a double victory. I've played basketball with the same guys for six years. Fun + exercise = a good investment.

Social Hobbies. If reconnecting with friends fills your tank, play a round of golf, try a new restaurant, start a Monday Night Football group or learn to roast coffee with buddies.

Reflective Hobbies. Leaving the cell phone at home and getting into creation can be one of the most refreshing ways to Sabbath. Hiking, fishing and backpacking can be some of the greatest spiritual retreats you'll ever experience.

Play is important, but not urgent. You'll be tempted to cancel your fishing trip or gardening work. Don't do it. It'll take some investment and intentionality, but it's crucial.

Ask these: *What activities do you do for fun?*

How often do you need to do them to refill your tank?

Relationships; don't camp alone in grizzly territory

Imagine you are tent camping in grizzly country. Oh yeah, you're alone. Without a gun. Every noise in the middle of the night

would feel like your imminent demise. It's just not a good decision. This is what doing ministry alone feels like. We're not designed to experience life alone, and we're especially not meant to go into spiritual battle alone. Proverbs is pretty clear about the value of team.

*Where there is no guidance, a people falls,
but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.*

Proverbs 11:14

I find the word "community" overused and confusing, but I love the word "team". Do you have an abundance of counselors? Who is your on your team? We need several teams around us. Here are a few teams you need in your life.

Family team: Those who love and care for your family

Ministry team: Those you do ministry alongside

Prayer team: Those praying for you and your needs

Church team: Leaders in your church family living the mission

Relationships aren't transactional, but we sometimes treat them like they are. Healthy teams don't just make your leadership stronger; they can make every teammate stronger. Teams require investment from all members. Everyone longs to be utilized, but no one wants to be used. Being an effective team member requires care, investment and reciprocal relationship. Ministry can feel like wilderness; don't tread the trail alone.

Ask these: *Which team is strongest for you?*

Which team is most lacking?

What would it take it develop this team?

Where can I find a bucket of wisdom around here?

*The beginning of wisdom is this:
Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.*

Proverbs 4:7

Some days I walk in the door from work and my head is spinning. I'm thinking through emails and lists and big decisions I need to make. I have a choice in that moment; pay attention to my work brain or choose to become present with my family. I don't trust myself. In those moments I've learned to hand my wife my phone and say "take it." Then I go wrestle with my kids.

We are constantly on the edge of small, but crucial, decisions. We live in the age of discernment. Those who have it will thrive. Those who lack it will destroy themselves. We make some good decisions and some bad ones. You can answer your emails from anywhere. Sometimes that's a good thing. Other times we need to put our phones away, become emotionally available to our families and get our work done tomorrow.

My wife and I try to cultivate discernment in our kids. Last year I studied through the Proverbs with my two sons over cinnamon twists during our weekly huddle. This year I'm working through Proverbs with my teenage daughter. The message of Proverbs; *live a wise life, and you'll prosper.*

Wisdom is a treasure. As ministry leaders we speak of wise living in sermons, team meetings and Bible studies, but we often fail to apply the very wisdom we're dishing out.

*You teach about living well, but are you living well?
You equip others for a wise life, but are you living one?*

We live in a world that lacks wisdom. I happen to believe followers of Jesus should be leading the way in the wisdom department. I long for the day Kingdom leaders are a model for right living. We can invite others to trade a stagnant cup of foolishness for a bucket of fresh wisdom. Here are some areas of wise living we must be growing in.

The wisdom of depth

The pace of life today is crazy. Technology and social media invite us to live a high-paced and shallow life. We are constantly wading through ankle-deep waters. We turn our eyes away from faces and toward screens. There's always one more person to connect with, app to check or email to answer. Cal Newport exposes the epidemic of the shallows in his brilliant book *Deep Work*. He believes, "depth will become increasingly rare and therefore increasingly valuable."^{vi} I agree! Wise living requires deep work. Newport says, "To produce your peak level you need to work for extended periods with full concentration on a single task free from distraction."^{vii} He calls this "deep work". As I write these words my phone is on airplane mode and wireless is disabled on my computer. Notifications aren't our master, the Living God is. As spiritual leaders we have to work to find deep

spaces to pray, think and study. It won't happen on accident. Deep thinking is what allows us to explore a topic and delve into what really matters in leadership.

Leadership Practice: *Wade past the shallows*

Depth exercise

- Take an audit of your time, attention and focus in your week
- Eliminate anything that lacks meaning and has become a drain
- Find strategies to move past the shallows into deep work
- Figure out ways to minimize technology use in non-crucial areas so you can focus on soul-deep activities

The wisdom of self-awareness

I'm not a shopper. I know exactly what I need, and I make a plan to sneak up on the item, grab it and exit the retail space efficiently. When I walk into our local mall I'm usually disoriented. I look for the nearest mall map and find the sticker that reads "You are here!" Then I plot the path toward where I need to go.

It's crucial to find the "You are here!" sticker in leadership. It's hard to know where we're going if we don't know where we are. There's one thing I know about all leaders; we believe we are further along than we actually are. Hunger is the currency of change, but awareness is the currency of direction. As spiritual leaders we desperately need self-awareness. We are aware of others and their success, but we lack awareness about who and where we actually are.

Sometimes a friend will look me in the eyes and ask me, “how are you?” Many times I don’t know how to answer that question. It’s complicated. Our lives are multi-faceted. Perhaps my family is thriving, but I feel overwhelmed about a project we’re working on within our church. Perhaps my body feels rested after vacation, but I need to hit a looming deadline. Perhaps I rushed through work for the last three hours and haven’t paused for more than ten seconds to collect myself. A frantic lifestyle eats self-awareness for breakfast. When we pause we realize things about ourselves and the world around us.

Another barrier to self awareness we experience is others-focus. One of satan’s greatest tools is self-obsession, but another tool he wields is others-obsession. Perhaps we’ve been scurrying around trying to meet others needs without focusing on our own needs. Perhaps we’re insecure about our leadership or ministry, because we’ve had our gaze locked on other leaders instead of the Almighty.

Leadership Practice: *Grow in self-awareness*

Self-awareness exercise

Ask these questions to yourself every day or every week. I often use these when coaching leaders and consulting with teams. I explain this more in the tools section at the end of this book.

Where am I thriving? These are victories. Thank God for the gifts He has given you.

Where am I struggling? These are areas you are inviting the Father into. Invite God to move, to create, to renew.

What's confusing? These are often the areas that are overwhelming you. Ask God to clarify what your next steps are.

What's missing? These are longings. Invite the Father to fill an area of longing.

The wisdom of healthy decisions

Our lives can spiral into unhealth with a string of a few unhealthy decisions. The good news is that the same thing is true of a healthy life. You build a healthy life by making a series of healthy decisions. Some would call this string of decisions "habits". Stephen Covey says, "Habits are powerful factors in our lives. Because they are consistent, often unconscious, patterns, they constantly, daily express our character and produce our effectiveness...or ineffectiveness."^{viii}

String habits together, and you have a process. Processes allow us to follow repeatable paths with our brains instead of reacting with our emotions. Healthy processes ground us and guard us. Putting these processes in place is a crucial step for leaders and organizations who are maturing.

Most kingdom leaders feel like they are simply reacting to situations around them. It's hard to design a healthy life if you believe you're simply a reactor. Perhaps we feel planning and pro-

cesses are unspiritual. Perhaps it sounds like too much work, and we've chosen laziness.

Immediacy creates emotion. The faster you feel pressure to make a decision the greater possibility you have of making an emotional decision. Processes translate emotional reactions into purposeful decisions. Develop processes in your personal life and leadership so you are acting instead of reacting. If you don't have processes you are making emotional decisions.

Leadership Practice: *Stack your healthy decisions*

Healthy decision-making exercise

Build healthy processes in these areas...

- Adding new commitments to your calendar
- Removing old commitments from your calendar
- Limiting your technology
- Limiting your availability to others
- Practicing and protecting sabbath
- Determining a realistic work schedule
- Blocking off time and location for deep work
- Deciding how you will interact with social media
- Creating avenues for your own learning
- Deciding on travel opportunities
- Deciding who you will invest your time in
- Dedicating time to invest in your spouse
- Dedicating time to invest in your kids

Which of these areas lack processes? Take the time right now to sketch new processes. Processes are only helpful if they are realistic and repeatable. Share these with your spouse and a few friends so they can ask you about them.

The wisdom of priority

We choose the impulse decision over the best decision hundreds of times a day. Stephen Covey differentiates these as things that are important, but not urgent.^{ix} Healthy disciplines live in the important zone, but aren't as urgent as the incessant emails and texts blowing up your phone. Things that are important, but not urgent, easily get pushed aside. These are things like rest, exercise, time around the right friends, date nights, prayer and vacation. Maturity is about doing the important over the urgent. The important things have the power to leave a legacy, develop character, mature us and relieve stress. Prioritize your life so the people and things that are most important don't get pushed out.

Healthy people prioritize their priorities. This sounds good on paper, but let's get real. All too often we live as ministry's slave, sacrificing the important (our spiritual and physical health, our family, our relationship with Jesus) for the urgent needs we see around us. The needs of others are in our faces today with ubiquitous email, texting and social media. Those we are in relationship with often have at least three ways to access us through our phones. Greater connectivity requires greater boundaries. Then there's the behemoth topic of social media which is the ultimate expression of urgency without importance. Social media is a

great tool, but a terrible master. Right-side up leaders prioritize every day.

Leadership Practice: *Choose the important over the urgent*

Prioritization exercise

- Make a list prioritizing your most important relationships
- Make a list prioritizing your most important activities
- Make a list prioritizing your most important needs
- Make a plan to keep these prioritized every week

Are you hungry?

We all ask, "Who has God made me to be?", but perhaps the more important question is, "Who is God making me into?"

Bob Goff

The feast is ready. You've prepared for hours. The table is set. The smell of bread wafts from the oven. A roast simmers in the crock pot. Your guests come in, sit down and pull up their chairs. You can prepare the feast and invite them to the table, but you can't make them eat. But in leadership we try to open up others' mouths and force them to eat. We assume they're hungry and know what an incredible feast awaits them.

Although we might try, *we can't make others hungry*. Hunger is the currency of change. It's a choice. It drives people to work harder than the rest, take painful steps, ask hard questions and keep grinding once they've tasted victory.

Jesus asked crucial questions. But some of them seemed obvious. Jesus asked a man who had been lame for thirty eight years, "Do you want to get well?" This wasn't a stupid question. He was looking for hunger and asking for invitation. The prophet Anonymous said, "People don't change until the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change". We don't change until we want to or we believe we have to.

Along with being a husband, a dad and a pastor I get the privilege of walking alongside leaders as a coach. I've watched business leaders, church leaders and non-profit leaders gain traction in their personal lives, relationships and careers. I've watched murky issues crystalize and leaders find hope again as they spun out of the mud. The common thread in every growing leader I've walked alongside was a large dose of hunger.

As leaders, we often assume people are hungry to change. Sometimes we want change so badly for them that we convince ourselves they want it. We end up carrying corpses around as our knees buckle and shoulders ache wondering why they aren't changing.

In this age leaders desperately need to move from dictators to coaches. People are attempting to navigate minefields of complexity with very few people on the journey with them. We've never had more voices around us, but loneliness has never been higher. We've never had more access to information, but people are starving for relationships. There's good news; we can position ourselves at crucial spaces in the lives of those around us. Just make sure you've been invited in.

Resolutions every right-side up leader needs to make...
I won't work harder on someone else's life than they're willing to work
I will ask others crucial questions, even when they seem obvious
I will put the ball back into their court
I will ask others for invitation into their growth proces

What if you were fully alive?

*Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.*

Proverbs 20:23

Every ministry leader voluntarily cannonballed into the transformation business. But many ministry leaders have lost the glimmer in their eyes. Cynicism kicked naiveté off the island. As ministry leaders, we enter complex realities where pain and joy and truth and grace intersect. We experience traces of beauty and brokenness every day that wage war on our hearts. I don't think we realize just how hard ministry can be.

I want to ask you some dangerous questions. *What could ministry feel like if you were fully alive? Would you jump out of bed on Monday morning? Would you laugh more? Would you come home early because your day was so fulfilling? Would you be able to savor a meeting instead of driving it?*

Maybe you've given up on being healthy. *Do you believe you can be in ministry and live the abundant life? Seriously, do you actually believe you can be in ministry and live a healthy life worth emulating? Is it possible?*

God isn't a cruel father who destines us to an empty cup and a full agenda. Call me crazy, but I believe ministry hedonism is ac-

tually possible.^x I believe we can love what we do. I believe we can thrive.

Although ministry leaders can slide into stagnant pools of unhealth it's not ministry's fault. We are responsible for your our own health.^{xi} Stop blaming it on ministry. Ministry is an easy scapegoat and an alluring idol. There's good news; being in ministry doesn't destine you to unhealth. If you are unhealthy you don't have to stay there. If you find yourself spinning in a toxic ministry system you might have to exit for the sake of your soul and your family. You can leave that blender and get healthy somewhere else, but you can often change your mindset and habits and get healthy where you already are. In a world shouting "go forth!" you can learn to stay forth.

I see great hope among ministry leaders today. We realize there's a problem. There are gaps we haven't addressed. We're talking a lot about holistic health. We feel greater permission for sabbath, rest, hobbies, boundaries and sabbaticals. But we have to receive these gifts. We have to invite Jesus into the broken places of our soul with outstretched arms and hopeful hearts.

We also have to do some work. We'll have to weed out the urgent for the important. We'll have to take responsibility for our unhealth and for our health. We'll find ourselves in the fog from time to time inching along. There will be moments we are clueless of nearly everything except the love of our Father. We'll doubt and we'll stumble and we'll get a front row seat to

glimpse at miracles unfolding in hearts, souls, minds, bodies and families. What a privilege!

Press on!

I wrote these words because I love ministry. Warts and all the Church is THE one and only Bride of Christ. Ministry is a sweet invitation with some complex realities attached. I also wrote this because I have found myself in seasons of unhealth where I wanted to quit. I've found myself in the fog wondering if God was done with me and burnout was inevitable. I wish I had a practical resource like this to lean on. I love God and his Church, but I also love ministry leaders of all shapes and sizes and tribes. I still feel honored to be one.

The words in this book won't shatter the foundations of the earth or earn me tenure at an Ivy League school, but they're real. They were born amidst struggle, and I still struggle to live them. They're simple, but they're not easy. Paul reminded those in Corinth of our great responsibility to serve Christ and steward the mysteries of God. Might we be called faithful servants and stewards. Get healthy so you can keep making an impact.

Press on! Do the work! It's worth it!

Daily or Weekly Journaling Questions

Ask these four questions daily or weekly for self-assessment or team check-ins. They will help you grow in self-awareness.

Where am I thriving? These are small (or large) victories you're experiencing.

What's the need? Celebration. Thank God for what He's given you and the season you are experiencing.

Where am I struggling? These are areas you are inviting the Father into.

What's the need? Prayer. Get on your knees and invite God to move and create and renew.

What's confusing? These areas are often overwhelming. Sometimes they're small unresolved details. Sometimes they're decisions you've been putting off. Points of confusion cause worry and steal energy. Don't push them off, take action.

What's the need? Clarity. Ask God to clarify what your next steps are and give you the courage to take them.

What's missing? These are longings. Some of them are easy to spot and make a plan to fill the gaps. Others require deeper heart work. Perhaps you have longings for deeper friendships or feel your intimacy is missing in your marriage or feel your church is missing leaders to lead the initiatives you are dreaming about.

What's the need? Fullness. Invite the Father to fill an area of longing. Sometimes you'll be the answer to your prayer here, and you'll need to get to work.

Weekly Planning Grid

I've developed a tool for planning your week in lieu of priorities, not accidents. Most ministry leaders don't plan their week; their week plans them. We have to schedule our priorities.^{xii} Here's a glance at a tool I utilize for every leader I coach. This is available for purchase in a user-friendly content at the Stay Forth Designs site. The most important piece is the purpose. Plan your week proactively, and avoid working all three blocks in one day if at all possible. Take ten minutes to fill this out before you start your week, and you'll be glad you did. Rinse, and repeat.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
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Purpose of day:

Morning:

Afternoon:

Evening:

Which day is my sabbath this week?

Which day will require most energy this week? Why?

What big events requiring more time this week?

What crucial meetings do I need to prepare for?

What MUST I plan ahead for?

Questions to ask yourself and your team

If you were going to burn out how would you do it?
How long do you have before you burn out at the current pace?
How effective is your sabbath? (1-10) Why?
What is getting in your way of practicing sabbath?
How well do you play? (1-10)
What leisure activities reenergize you?
Which area of your life is most healthy right now? Why?
Which area is most unhealthy? What's your next step toward health?
Which controllables have you not been controlling?
What unhealthy habits have you created? How will you combat those?
Who have you invited to ask you about your personal health?
In which specific areas do you feel helpless? How did you learn that helplessness?
Where is your time and energy leaking?
What is your daily and weekly plan for rest?
Which facet of health are you overlooking or avoiding?
What aspect of leadership depletes you the most?
What do you enjoy that's healthy for you?
Do you actually believe health leads to impact?
What urgent, but unimportant, activities do you need to limit?
What are you investing in that's important, but not urgent?

Helpful resources

Here's a list of resources to sharpen your axe and deepen your learning on your journey to becoming a Right-Side up Leader.

The Proverbs

A study of Exodus 18

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Steven Covey

The Rest of God, Mark Buchanan

The Emotionally Healthy Church, Peter Scazzaro

Everyone's a Genius, Alan Briggs

Divine Direction, Craig Groeschel

Deep Work, Cal Newport

In the name of Jesus, Henri Nouwen

Author Bio

Alan Briggs is the Director of Frontline Church Planting, the Multiplying Pastor at Vanguard Church and the Lead Creative at Stay Forth Designs where he equips leaders and teams for health and kingdom impact. He's a proud dad of four and a missionary to his neighborhood and city. His books *Staying is the New Going* (2015) and *Guardrails* (2016) and *Everyone's a Genius* (2017) help leaders catch a bigger vision for their life. He is convinced healthy lives lead to greater impact.

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Sources

Steven Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

Cal Newport, *Deep Work*

Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*

All scripture references are ESV unless otherwise stated

Endnotes

- ⁱ Dr. Stephen Cabral on John Lee Dumas' podcast
- ⁱⁱ Psalm 127:2B, ESV
- ⁱⁱⁱ Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*, p.77
- ^{iv} From a sermon by Chad Brooks
- ^v I highly recommend *You are what you Love* by James K.A. Smith. He talks extensively about the good life.
- ^{vi} Cal Newport, *Deep Work*, p.71
- ^{vii} Cal Newport, *Deep Work*, p.44
- ^{viii} Steven Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p.46
- ^{ix} Steven Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p.151
- ^x John Piper talks of Christian hedonism in light of the gospel in his book *Desiring God*
- ^{xi} Kay Warren at MULTIPLY Conference 2017, Vanguard Church, Colorado Springs
- ^{xii} Borrowed from Stephen Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*