



# **Leaders Who Last**

## **12 Conversations**

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**Leaders Who Last: 12 Conversations**

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## Leaders Who Last: 12 Conversations

Ministry leaders leave formal ministry at a disconcerting and alarming rate. Some say 50% of young ministers will not last 5 years. A 2009 Schaeffer Institute study of 1050 pastors, reports 100% of the respondents had a colleague who left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure. Many ministers report burnout, having no close friend, marital and family stresses, church conflicts, and emotional pain. We need to be proactive in supporting those in ministry to thrive and last well.

### Use of these Conversation Guides

This resource is designed for leaders for peer learning and friendship. Some may choose to use it for mentoring with a more experienced leader; however its primary design is for peers in leadership. The questions are designed to be as “open” as possible. They do not have a specific or “right” answer. You are encouraged to bring your life stories to the questions and apply your experiences as they fit for you.

Through the years, researchers, theologians, philosophers, counselors, leaders, and **grandma** would agree that no one does well as an island. We do not have to work hard to remember the burnout or “fallout” of a colleague who was alone, discouraged, and quit. The reasons may be varied and sometimes have tragic consequences.

A brief overview of these questions may seem overwhelming for most people because of the issues that they raise. **Take your time** in processing your thoughts and feelings. The goal is healthy longevity and resilience in ministry, not simply the completion of “12 Conversations.”

There are a number of ways you can utilize these guides. The questions can be answered as an individual for personal time in reflection and journaling with God. Others may choose a “kindred spirit” type of friend, locally or at a distance by phone or SKYPE, to share responses in consistent times of nurturing friendship and mutual accountability. Some people may want to create a discussion group of people within a local or a larger geographic area that meet together to support one another in leadership and discovery. Whatever variation you choose, these conversations become sacred places for God’s grace, acceptance, encouragement for his servants.

As scripture says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, bear one another’s burdens, and cast our anxieties upon the God of all comfort who cares for us as we comfort others.” (Hebrews 10:24; Galatians 6:2; 1 Peter 5:7; 2 Corinthians 1: 3,4)

## **Our goals are:**

- Friendship & caring presence
- Renewal / growth / nurturance
- Accountability / strength in community
- Peer learning / sharing wisdom
- Longevity in leadership
- Resiliency
- Increased self-understanding
- Prayer, discipline, and deepening our walk with God along with one or more people

## **Ten Guidelines for Conversations**

1. Choose a kindred spirit or group carefully. You want someone who “gets it.” If you are in a group, choose a contact person or host for any meeting details.
2. Listen. Take turns sharing your story in response to questions.
3. There is no “right” expected answer. Simply share your narrative of thoughts, feelings, and experiences in response to the questions.
4. Choose to answer questions only at the comfort level you have about the topic or question.
5. This is a friendship, support level of conversation, NOT COUNSELING. Humbly share your experience, but do not advise, fix, save, or take charge of the other person.
6. Not all questions have to be discussed. Do not push the other people to discuss questions on which they would like to pass.
7. Because of the intimate nature of building supportive friendships, keep one-to-one uses of this material to your same gender.
8. Take your time. You will not get to all the questions of a topic in one conversation. Depending on your situation, you may want to meet more than once per conversation topic. Be consistent in your agreed upon interval of meeting times.
9. Observe boundaries. Be a friend or group member in this relationship. Do not intrude or become a “constant companion.”
10. Respect each other’s privacy. Do NOT share others’ stories with anyone. ONLY share your own stories with your spouse or other people. Keep your spouse involved in your self-insights and growth. Make this a covenant with your spouse and with your kindred spirits in conversation. Your safety, trust, and transparency will be blessed.

## **12 Conversations: Leaders Who Last**

The twelve topics are selected from males and females who responded to the fall 2015 online leadership survey I conducted, books and articles I read on my 2015 sabbatical, and my work from over 40 years of counseling ministry in serving both individual leaders and couples. I entertained the idea of scriptures, statistics, and impressive quotes to introduce each topic. I felt those compelling pieces would influence, slant, or deflect the conversation differently than a given participant might need. I present these twelve conversations with the “validity “ of their face value for those of us who “get” these issues as we serve in leadership roles. May God bless us, our marriage and families, friends, and those we serve as we examine and share our lives through these conversations.

- 1. Friendships and Motivations for Ministry**
- 2. Physical Health**
- 3. Family and Spiritual Formation**
- 4. Emotional Health**
- 5. Marriage and Family Health**
- 6. Technology, Internet, and Social Media**
- 7. Stress and Coping – I (Leadership Challenges, Burnout, & Fatigue)**
- 8. Stress and Coping – II (The Darker Sides of Leadership)**
- 9. Renewal**
- 10. Sexual Health / Temptations**
- 11. Financial Health**
- 12. Self Care**

## **Friendships and Motivations for Ministry**

What shaped you growing up to choose this work? How did you decide to become a minister or leader in this work? Why do you continue to serve?

Who played a significant role in your faith development and journey?

How do you see that God shaped your unique personality and gifting? In light of that, what do you need to do to better care for yourself?

What do you believe it takes to be effective for a lifetime in your line of work?

How has God communicated some sense of calling to you for your chosen ministry? What vision do you see that God has for your life and leadership? How is God using you in unexpected ways, past or present?

What kinds of activities are you involved in right now that you find personally satisfying? What kinds of activities are you involved in right now which are causing you more stress than fulfillment?

Who is a support person or mentor to you in your work?

How have you seen God's goodness working in your life?

How well do you do in leaving God to manage outcomes versus feeling responsible for managing outcomes yourself?

With whom do you enjoy spending time?

If you are in a difficult situation, whom do you call?

Who really knows you, cares about you, and with whom can you be real, authentic, and openly talk about yourself, family, and experiences?

What are you doing to have a friendship outside your church?

What people are in your life that provide strong support to you?

If you feel "placed on a pedestal," how do you handle the loneliness and isolation that may result?

## Physical Health

How would you describe your physical health?

How intentional are you in attending to or promoting your physical health?

As you reflect on your current diet, what do you eat and drink? What effect does this have on you?

How often do you exercise? What do you do for exercise and what impact does this have on you?

With whom do you enjoy exercising?

When was your last physical exam? Are there any issues that need attention?

What do you like about yourself and the body God has given you?

Is weight gain or sedentary lifestyle affecting you regarding cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, arthritis, or other physical condition?

What are your sleep patterns and what influences them?

What keeps you up at night and how are you handling it?

What correlations are there between how you manage your physical, emotional, and spiritual health?

How does your work impact your health? How often do you engage in "Sabbath rest," not just a day off to be busy running errands?

What are your challenges or best "reasons" for not taking better care of your physical health?

What are some of your genetic or family of origin habit patterns regarding health issues?

## **Family and Spiritual Formation**

As you grew up, who was the dominant person in your family and how did you learn to relate to them? How do you see that playing out in any current relationships?

What were major life-changing events and / or crises in your family that impacted you?

Who were your role models of leadership in your life as you grew up? What expectations do you have of yourself as you lead as a result of these role models?

What patterns of emotions and behaviors do you see in family of origin with your parents, aunts & uncles, and grandparents? How do these play out in your current relationships?

How did your parents respond to your emotions?

What words or short phrases describe the leadership styles of your father, mother, and grandparents?

How were you drawn into relationship with your spouse and what were your expectations of him or her?

How would you describe your spiritual health? What effect does your ministry have on your spiritual health?

What do you do for your spiritual health and how often do you engage in this?

How would you describe this season of your life and how God is shaping you?

How have you found ways to have Sabbath rest as part of your spiritual discipline?

How would you describe your current relationship with God?

Do you schedule time away for prayer and reflection? What are some successes and challenges you have experienced with this?

From whom do you experience God's guidance and spiritual direction?

When do you feel God's peace?



## Emotional Health

If your emotions were described as a weather report, what would the weather be?

How well do you proactively manage your emotions and appropriately respond to the emotions of others? Share a time when you succeeded and a time when you disappointed yourself.

Where does your worth come from? If life were the way you desired, what would it look like?

To what degree do you feel lonely or unappreciated?

What is your emotional experience when you have to say “no” to someone?

How would you describe your overall contentment?

How would you describe both past and recent experiences with anger?

When do you experience happiness? When do you experience sadness?

Is your life lived predominantly in a positive or negative mode?

How have you responded to times when people have hurt you?

What is your experience with shame and / or guilt?

Who nurtures you and supports you? With whom do you feel emotionally safe?

How do you deal with feelings of inadequacy, realizing our leadership expectations and tasks are greater than our abilities?

Where are you on the scales of perfectionism and procrastination? How does this impact you and your work?

How well developed is your sense of humor? How does humor help you in your work?

How do you handle criticism? What grudges or resentments do you hold? What does this say about you?

If it is true that criticism says more about the person giving it than the person being criticized, how do you balance the criticism of others with God’s truth in the matter?

## **Marriage and Family Health**

Which TV show or movie best represents your marriage and family?

What big dream do you have for your marriage or family?

What is the best vacation you ever took?

How well are you balancing the expectation of others versus the needs of your spouse and family?

What challenges and successes can you share of balancing family time priorities and work priorities?

How do you want to be remembered as husband/father or wife/mother? What are you doing to make that a reality?

In what ways do you include your spouse and / or family in your work?

How do you help your children and spouse feel safe in your work context?

How do you help your spouse and family deal with living in the fishbowl?

What do you do as a family to get away from ministry responsibilities?

Do your spouse and / or family participate in all the church's activities?

How much do you talk about your ministry at home and how does that work for you?

How do your spouse and family feel about your work?

What do you and your spouse and / or family do to play together?

What are the tensions you are feeling right now related to family life and work?

How do you deal with and protect your family from intrusiveness of some church members?

How often do you date your spouse and spend private time together? What do you do that makes this happen?

What differences are there in your public persona and how your spouse and family see you at home?

## **Technology, Internet, and Social Media**

What are your habits of usage of television, smartphone, computer, and internet?  
How many hours a day are you connected?

How would you describe your level of involvement with social media? What does your social media say about you?

How honest are you on social media?

Does social media encourage or discourage you as you “see” what is going on in other people’s lives via Facebook or other social platform?

How is your use of social media impacting your face-to-face relationships with people?

How does technology serve you or do you wind up “hostage” to your technology?

When is the last time you went on a technology “fast” for 24 – 48 hours? Could you do this? What are the challenges or your best excuses for not taking a Sabbath rest from technology?

How is social media helping you in your ministry?

How do you manage temptations of the internet, social media, T.V. & magazine “soft porn,” and pornography?

What are your potential pitfalls as it relates to personal purity (thoughts and actions)? When is that struggle most obvious in your daily/weekly rhythm of life?

How are you attentive to your character in order to stay transparent, open, and authentic? In social media do you hide your real self or overstate the positives for image management?

Does my use of time with social media reflect what is really important to you?

What would you change about your online life and website visits if your screen were projected in the auditorium on Sunday morning?

## **Stress and Coping - I**

(Leadership Challenges, Burnout, & Fatigue)

Who do you know who is effective in ministry, but who does not seem hurried?

What is a recent challenge you have experienced in your leadership? What do you like about this and what do you wish you had done differently?

Who in your life understands you?

What areas of my leadership do you consider a “strength?” What areas of my leadership could use some work?

How have you handled a difficult person lately? What are you learning about yourself and others?

What has been the most successful area of your ministry in the last year and do you feel like you handled the growth well or is there something you wish you had done differently?

What has been your greatest area of disappointment in your ministry in the last year and do you feel like you handled it well or is there something you wish you had done differently?

How are the margins in your life? Do you “overbook” or “underbook” your schedule?

How do you handle the leadership persona of twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year?

What are some of the most important ingredients necessary for building healthy relationships with those who oversee your work?

What kind of work issues make you feel out-of-balance?

How hard is it for you to ask for help? How does this impact your work?

How well do you exercise your limits of expertise? What are some examples of referring issues to others?

How do you judge excellence in ministry?

## **Stress and Coping - I I**

### The Darker Sides of Leadership

What term would you use to describe your level of work ethic?  
(workaholic, easy street, last minute, list maker, busy beaver, marathoner, avoider,  
playful, other \_\_\_\_\_ ) How well does the pace of your work serve you or  
challenge you?

How well do you work with others and what are some examples of this?

How do you handle the culture of some ministries where many people consider  
themselves your “boss” when that is not their role?

What needs of yours are being filled by leading?

What individuals do you trust to give you support who know and understand the  
real you?

What kinds of ministry issues make you feel out-of-balance? What makes a matter  
so important that it must be defended/pursued at all costs?

How do you function with the potential 24 / 7 expectations of you? How do you  
cope with “role overload” of the identity / ministry you have chosen?

What resources on leadership have you found most helpful? How would you  
describe your leadership style? How can we help one another improve our  
leadership skills?

What are some of the most important ingredients necessary for building healthy  
relations with other leaders and employers?

What would happen if you had to make a positive comment about someone for  
every negative comment you made about him or her?

What ministry concerns sometimes make you feel inadequate? Do you believe  
ministers are ever totally adequate for their ministries?

What part of your work leaves you feeling stronger? What part of your work leaves  
you feeling weaker?

What does your self-talk sound like and how well does it serve you?

Are you more concerned about what others think of you (your image) or are you  
more concerned with how you behave even when no one is looking (your  
character)?

## Renewal

What are your highs and lows in your work?

How would you describe your prayer life? What is helpful to you in your prayer life?

How often do you and your spouse pray together?

What's going on with you that we could pray about right now?

Where do you discern the Lord leading you? What decisions/actions do you need to pursue?

How often do you engage in Sabbath rest as a spiritual discipline and what does that look like for you?

Can you share a time when you became acutely aware of the need for reliance upon God?

At this stage of your life, what do you need to learn next? At this stage in your life, what legacy are you leaving?

If "being" is as important as "doing," what are you focused on in "being" God's servant.

What is the one thing you are afraid to ask God to do in your life?

In what continuing education do you participate?

If you disqualified time spent in preparation to teach or preach, how much time do you spend in God's word just for your own private spiritual discipline of growth & renewal?

What would it look like for you to lead more from God's heart instead of your performance-based or "image-management" drive?

How well is grace experienced/received in your own life as well as grace you extend to others? What place does guilt play in your life and what helps you to let go of it?

How do you define sanctification in your life in a practical, daily manner? How is God challenging your growth in the renewing of your mind in the likeness of Christ?

What fruit of the spirit is easily seen in your life and what challenges you in exercising love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

## **Sexual Health / Temptations**

What do you believe are some of the most common struggles we face regarding our sexuality? How does your gender play into this?

What are your challenges with the various forms of pornography?

What are some myths and/or truths about our sexuality?

What earlier experiences in your life influence your current sexuality?

What kind of plan do you believe Satan has in mind for you and your family? What is he currently doing to attempt to accomplish that plan?

How do you maintain appropriate boundaries with others of the opposite sex?

How well maintained are your fences and boundaries regarding temptation? What are small but important ways that you maintain your boundaries?

Which areas of your life are most vulnerable to Satan?

What contributes to your weakness in resisting temptation? If you kept a journal leading up to falling to a temptation, what might you record about your mood, physical needs, emotional needs, feelings, and or relationships?

Does your spouse or a close friend/accountability partner understand what challenges you sexually?

When was the last time you and your spouse talked about your sex life, needs and desires? What do you need to do in this part of your life together?

What aspects of ministry set you up for isolation and temptation?

What do you do to promote and maintain your purity in heart and behavior regarding your sexuality?

How do you see the image of God in people instead of sexualizing or objectifying them as society evaluates beauty, relationships, and body image?

How do you experience guilt, repentance, renewal, and support in being God's new creation in Christ?

## Financial Health

If your “finances” could talk, what would they say are important to you?

What are family and cultural scripts that shape your beliefs and habits about earning and spending?

How often do you and your spouse talk about money and how do those discussions go?

How much money is enough?

How well do you share your money, possessions, and resources to serve others?

What possessions “own” you . . . to which you have to give significant time and attention?

What is on your wish list? What do you treasure in your life? If you did a “covet /envy check up” for your life, what would be the results?

How would you rate your financial stress? If in debt, how are you managing it?

What are you doing to prepare financially for retirement?

What kind of financial plan do you have in place today?

What kind of financial counsel have you received from others?

Do you know what you need to be doing today in order to retire with adequate retirement funds?

What value or role does money play in your life? Is it valued as a simple necessity, status, power, enjoyment, sharing / giving, stability, independence, recreation, travel, acquiring the latest tech or gadgets, or some other function?



## Self-Care

What would a good friend say about your self care?

What friendship do you have that provides you with the antidote to isolation and the resource/solution to loneliness?

What friend do you have who simply lets you “be” who you are instead of relating to you for what you “do” in ministry?

How do hobbies and sports fit into your self care?

What positive distractions from your leadership role do you have? How do you get away from your work?

How difficult is it for you to ask for help? How does this work for you?

How do you maintain an identity apart from your work role?

How do you reasonably protect your days off?

How do you reward yourself for work that is well done?

Do you feel guilty for taking time off to pursue a hobby or sport? How do you cope with this? Who is an encouragement to you?

How do you recover from difficult moments in ministry when people have been unkind or simply mean to you?

Have you ever felt that you might be a workaholic or feel that you over function with no time for hobbies or sports?

Do you have a feeling you may be procrastinating and under-functioning in your work given your love for hobbies or sports?

If you set some time aside for “holy leisure,” what would that look like?

When was the last time you and your spouse discussed your priorities and time management?

How have these 12 conversations been helpful to you?