

A person wearing a red sweater is sitting at a wooden table, reading an open book. There are two cups of coffee on the table, one in the foreground and one in the background. The scene is warm and cozy.

*Life-Giving Leaders*  
ONLINE TRAINING



DIGITAL NOTEBOOK

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The Son  
of Man did  
NOT come to be  
served, BUT to  
serve, AND to  
give HIS life  
as a ransom  
FOR many.

MATTHEW 20:28 CSB



## Introduction

Helen Roseveare, an English missionary doctor serving in the Congo, tells of a profound moment in her ministry when she learned the secret of a flourishing Christian life.

It happened after living four years in the Congo. Things weren't going the way Helen planned. She had grown irritable, impatient, and short-tempered. She was near total exhaustion from carrying an impossible workload and endless responsibilities. If she was going to endure for the long haul, something had to change. More than anything, Helen needed to seek God's forgiveness and restoration. In her book, *Living Holiness*, she records her spiritually wrecked state:

I felt crushed by my own wretchedness and oft-repeated failures. I knew I was unworthy of the title missionary, and I yearned to know the secret of a closer walk with God and of a new in-filling by the Holy Spirit.

Helen turned to an African church elder, Pastor Ndugu, and his wife for help. Sitting by the fire in their hut, the pastor opened his Bible to Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Next the pastor drew a straight vertical line in the dirt floor with his heel saying, "The capital *I* in our lives—*self*—is the great enemy."

After a long pause, Pastor Ndugu spoke the hard truth, "The trouble with you is that we see so much Helen that we cannot see Jesus." The flames of the fire must have felt like a hot knife puncturing her heart. The pastor went further to offer a piece of practical advice. He knew that Helen drank a lot of coffee, so he suggested that while she waited for the steaming beverage to cool, she pray, "Please, God, cross out the *I*."

Pastor Ndugu lifted his heel to draw again. This time, he etched a horizontal line across the *I* he'd previously drawn and repeated, "Please, God, cross out the *I*." Marked in the dirt was a

simplified theology lesson: **the cross is the “crossed-out-I” life.** From that day, Helen sought, however imperfectly, to allow the Master Potter to have His way in her life, undoing and remaking His vessel to reflect His glory. More of Jesus—less of Helen.

Like Helen Roseveare, in my early years of leading women, I needed to learn the crossed-out-I life. Too much of my ministry was all about me. Behind my back, I was called the “pistol.” (This comment was clearly not meant as a compliment.) I was life-taking in the way I pushed my personal goals forward and rolled over people who didn’t agree or blocked the path (in the nicest way, of course). I wasn’t seeking God’s glory nearly as much as pursuing Leslie’s glory. I was in total control, and happily so. You get the picture: *there wasn’t much Jesus shining through.*

Leaders like me could get the job done—but at what cost? You don’t have to look very far to find a trail of wounded people, deep regrets, sin, and ministry fruit that may appear lush but rots quickly. **The worst of it is that life-taking leaders tarnish the beauty of the gospel.**

Perhaps you’ve been steam rolled by life takers: power-hungry, self-focused, demanding, productivity-driven bullies in the church or the workplace. This is a far cry from the way of Jesus who modeled a radically different leadership style. The ever gentle and humble-hearted Savior laid down His life, His rights, His plan in exchange for the Father’s will. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). The kingdom of heaven cuts across the grain of our human thinking. **God’s kingdom is upside down: the greatest is the least; the last is the first; the slave is free; the cross is a crown.**

The difference between the life-giver and life-taker can manifest in brash or subtle ways. Sometimes, like the legalistic Pharisees, our life-taking ways are securely locked away in the unseen attitudes of our hearts. We can appear to be the most focused and zealous workers for the Lord while being blinded to the reality that something isn’t right—until we’re confronted by the cross of Christ that exposes and detoxes our hearts.

I’ve led both ways, and I’m thankful the gospel continues to transform me from a life-taker into a life-giver. My focus and confidence are no longer rooted in self but in my glorious Savior, who is the source of continual joy and soul refreshment. **Death to self is the ticket to paradise: a life freed from pride, control, and selfish independence.** *The crossed-out-I life.*

Do you desperately need Jesus to help you fulfill your daily calling to serve Him? I hope so. How blessed are the weak and needy leaders! The more we are stripped of natural abilities and self-reliance, the more we will thrive in ministry with an overflowing power from the Holy Spirit. More of Jesus—less of self.

You’ve taken the first step to becoming the leader you were designed to be—one who leads sacrificially and obediently like Jesus. Bravo, friend! Begin your journey of transformation by meditating on the Scriptures found on pages 8–9. Ask God to reveal if you’re exhibiting any

life-taking characteristics. Jesus can teach us to breathe in and breathe out His life and love in our family, church, and ministry.

And, one more thing. Please don't keep this message to yourself. Live it. Share it. My hope is that God will raise up a new generation of humble servant leaders who can chip away the life-taking cultures around us so that the world can clearly see more of Jesus.

I'm cheering for you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leslie Bennett".

Leslie Bennett has led Women's Ministry in two churches and serves on the *Revive Our Hearts* ministry team. A teacher at heart, she is devoted to training and discipling the next generation to treasure Christ above all. Leslie and her husband, Mac, live in South Carolina, where she loves spending time with family and drinking sweet tea.

*Helen M. Roseveare, Living Holiness: Willing to be The Legs of a Galloping Horse (Geanies House, Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 75-76.*





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# *Life-Giving Truths*

*“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,  
and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

—MATTHEW 20:28

*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.  
And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,  
who loved me and gave himself for me.*

—GALATIANS 2:20

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,  
it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

—JOHN 12:24

*Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 CSB

*We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.  
So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you  
not only the gospel of God but also our own selves,  
because you had become very dear to us.*

—1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-8

*“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself  
and take up his cross and follow me.  
For whoever would save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”*

—MARK 8:34-35

*He must increase, but I must decrease.*

—JOHN 3:30

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

—PSALM 51:17



*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord;  
let it be to me according to your word."  
And the angel departed from her.*

—LUKE 1:38

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,  
being born in the likeness of men.*

—PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7



# *She Is Marked by Brokenness*

BY DR. CRAWFORD LORITTS

When the Bible talks about brokenness, it's not talking about woundedness. **I define brokenness as a permanent awareness of God-neediness.** Brokenness stands on two pillars. The first is **proactive surrender.**

Moses was a man used greatly by God. By the time we meet Moses in the desert, in Exodus 3, Moses is not proud; he is not pompous. In fact, it's safe to say, if you read chapters 3 and 4, that Moses is struggling with some hesitancy and has lost his self-confidence.

He meets God in a burning bush. It wasn't the fact that the bush was burning that attracted him; brush fires take place in that part of the world all the time. But it was the fact that the bush wasn't consumed. So Moses approaches God, and God says, "Take off your sandals, for the ground on which you're standing is holy."

I think the main reason God wanted Moses to take his sandals off was to see the amazing distance between him and God. God wanted Moses' feet to touch the dirt from whence he came; He wanted that juxtaposition, that distance. "I'm touching dirt, but I'm looking at God!"

*It is not the amount of gifts that you have,  
but the depth of your dependence that matters.*

Then God calls him. And Moses begins to try to unravel the calling, right? He begins to tamp it down, and he says, "I don't want to do that." He tries to talk God out of it. Then God, with great intensity (I really believe that's how you should read Exodus 4), says, "All right, Moses, you say you can't do it. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"A staff." (A rod, actually.)

"Throw it down." It becomes a snake. "Pick it back up."

"Show me your hand. Put it in your bosom. Take it out."

Leprous. "Put it back in." Whole.

What God was saying to Moses was, "I don't use what you bring to the table, anyway. But I use what you surrender to Me." **It is not the amount of gifts that you have, but the depth of your dependence that matters.**

The second part of brokenness, after proactive surrender—the constant giving over to God—has to do with **an acute awareness of our sinfulness**. Every great man or woman of God, whom God trusted with His assignments, understood that they were a quarter inch away from doing the most damnable, despicable, awful, ugly things imaginable.

David forgot that. In his great prayer of repentance in Psalm 51, he says, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (vv. 16–17).

Don’t ever pray that God will take away the remembrance of your devastating failures. In fact, contrition is the active remembrance of the pain that your sin caused. That’s not guilt—that’s been taken away. But don’t step back too far. Here’s the point: **The reason God wants us to be broken is because His assignments are always holy**. His assignments are always a statement about Him, not a statement about me.

*Brokenness is your friend. Brokenness is your ally. The pain that you feel, the tears that you shed, are holy fertilizer.*

I don’t lead by my biographical sketch or my résumé. It’s not about you, it never was about you, and it never will be about you. It’s always about what God wants done, so He needs reliant people. Some of you are frustrated in ministry because there’s too much of you involved in ministry. Some of you, God won’t let you go any further; He won’t do any more through you. Why? Because your head is too big—it’s too much about you.

By the way, brokenness is not just a point; it’s also a process. There are seasons of brokenness, times of pressing in. **Brokenness is your friend. Brokenness is your ally. The pain that you feel, the tears that you shed, are holy fertilizer.**

That’s why God said to Moses, “You’re usable now, Buddy. You don’t think you bring anything to the table? *Watch Me*. You’re hesitant? *That’s where I want you.*” Every great man or woman of God, every person God trusted with His assignments, first of all was marked by brokenness.

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

- How can brokenness, a permanent awareness of God-neediness, become a friend and ally in your life?
- What would a deeper dependence on God look like in your life? Have you surrendered your gifts to His use?
- Have you felt insecure in leadership? How are you encouraged by Moses, a man greatly used by God?
- Are there sins in your life preventing you from being greatly used by God?

# She Is Marked by Uncommon Communion

BY DR. CRAWFORD LORITTS

Every great man or woman of God, that God entrusted with His assignments, was characterized and marked by what I call uncommon communion.

What do I mean by that? Let me see if I can explain. I do not mean just your devotional life or just your prayer life. Listen to me, this is going to help somebody: If you can *measure* what you're doing, ninety-nine percent of the time it's not from God.

God uses gaps. In other words, **God's assignment is always greater than what I can bring to the table.** The reason is this: God uses the assignment to develop the leader and her character. Uncommon communion means that with the gap, God is calling for me to enter into the tent of meeting (Exodus 33)—to tap His heart for the resources I need to do what He's called me to do. **In the process of accomplishing something, I become somebody.** When I understand that the ministry is God's primary tool of my sanctification, it drives me to the heart of God, and that's where I get the resources to do what He's called me to do.

*God's assignment is always greater  
than what I can bring to the table.*

The reason God uses people, not committees, to lead is because the leader is the portrait, the desired destination at which other people need to arrive. I've never met a great man or woman of God, whom God trusted with His assignments, that did not have a great prayer life, because the very nature of what He's called you to do, whatever that might be, requires resources that you do not have. You press into Him to get them.

God is not going to use anything or anyone who comes to Him "together." He smashes it and remakes it so there's a holy handicap. And then, He leaves a gap. Because He says, "I want you to obey Me when you don't know where you're going, you don't know when I'm going to deliver, and you don't know why I'm doing the excruciating. I want you to obey Me. You're always going to have to come to Me, and my answers will be *à la carte*." That seems cruel, doesn't it? But that's the way it works.

I want to encourage you, don't run from the gap. Don't quit. *Press into it.* The greatest gift you can give to the women who are looking to you is to let them see you believing God for *all* of what you don't have. **Leadership is a place to demonstrate the greatness of our God, to bring glory to Him.**

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

- What resources do you lack to do what God has called you to do? Write out a prayer asking Him to provide all that you need.
- How is God using “the gap” to develop your character in your current ministry role?
- Can you measure the results of your leadership? What would it look like to press more deeply into prayer?
- How have your experiences leading others served to sanctify you?

# *She Is Marked by Obedience*

BY DR. CRAWFORD LORITTS

Dr. Bill Bright was the founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ. I remember something he used to say to us younger leaders all the time. This is burned in my heart, and this is the reason God used Bill Bright so greatly. Dr. Bright used to look us in the eye all the time and say, “You don’t have to be successful, but you do have to be obedient.”

I love Paul’s eulogy of David in Acts 13. Beginning at verse 22, he’s contrasting the motivation of Saul with the motivation of David, and he says,

“When he [God] had removed him [Saul], he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’”

The word “will” in Greek is actually plural. He says, “I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my own heart, who will do all my [wills],” as *an assignment*. What made David great was not that he didn’t fail—we know he did. What made him great was that he just kept doing what God said over and over. Wake up every morning and say, “God, help me to show up. Help me not to run. Help me not to quit. Help me to finish it. Help me not to be lazy.”

*The greatest thing that can ever be said about you  
is that you did what God told you to do.*

And having done that day in and day out, those “wills” wove a tapestry of God’s purpose for David. So he says in verse 36, “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption.”

The greatest thing that could ever be said about Crawford Loritts is that I did what God told me to do, and what He does with that is His business. **The greatest thing that can ever be said about you is that you did what God told you to do.**

I’ve been around some great leaders in my life, and with the truly great Christian leaders—this is uncanny—you get the sense when you’re in their presence that they would rather die than disobey God. *How about you?*

The question is: can God trust you—can He trust me—with His assignments? Am I using God as a platform to get to where I want to be? See, when you understand these things, you conclude several things:

1. **Don't ever tell God how to use you.** God can do with you and with me whatever He wants to do.
2. **What God has for you, no mortal man can take from you.** It's tremendous freedom! You don't have to look out the rearview or the side mirror; you don't have to compare yourself with anyone else.
3. **You don't have to lead with your "rights"—just respond to what is right.** People who lead with their rights only grow to the level of their demands. And I have learned in my life that often, in order for me to get to where God wants me to be, my "rights" have to be violated. But it's not a statement about me anyway, is it? It's not about my image; it's all about Him.
4. **You don't lead with your gifts—you lead with brokenness.** I didn't say gifts aren't important. They are important, but I think we have the cart before the horse. You lead with brokenness; you lead with Jesus; you lead with your heart for Him. Then He breathes on what gifts you have, whether you have five or two or a half of one or whatever. That's kind of unimportant.

*Lord, may we give to the people who look to us for leadership the gift of authentic godliness. May we give to them the gift of authentic love for the Savior and a passion for them. And Lord Jesus, may we have a passion to stand before Your throne and say, "I may not have been the sharpest pencil in the box—I may not have been the most gifted person, but by Your grace I did what You told me to do."*

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

- What are God's assignments for you in this season? Are you willing to be used in whatever way He desires?
- Could it be said of you that you'd rather die than disobey the Lord? Why or why not?
- Describe in your own words the difference between success and obedience.
- Ask Jesus to help you lead with brokenness instead of giftedness.



# *She Cultivates a Life-Giving Community*

BY SUSAN HUNT & KAREN HODGE

Many years ago I (Susan) spoke for a retreat where I knew no one before I arrived. After the first session on Friday night, I returned to my room thinking that something was not right. Several times the next morning, individual women approached and quietly thanked me. I was increasingly aware of their hesitancy and uncertainty. In the afternoon a woman waited until we could speak alone. She was visibly nervous as she said, “There is division in our church, and I don’t even know what the issues are. I don’t know what to do.”

When I suggested she talk with an elder, tears welled up in her eyes. “But the division is with our elders, and I feel pressured to choose a side. I’m so confused and sad.”

Immediately I understood the dark cloud hanging over the retreat. When leaders let their conflicts leak to the congregation, unity unravels. The same is true for a ministry team. We have both had many similar experiences. There are conflicts that are theological, but often they are relational. Interestingly, we have seen relational conflicts start and stop with women. We have seen wives of leaders complain to their husbands and to one another, and women on servant teams gossip and grumble until tension and disagreements spread like wildfire. And we have seen women unite their hearts in prayer to defend and protect unity. **Our conclusion is that women are the keepers of the culture in the home and church. In many ways, community life depends on the unity of the women.**

*Women are the keepers of the culture in the home and church.  
In many ways, community life depends on the unity of the women.*

In her song following the defeat of Israel’s enemy, Deborah sang, “Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose. Arose a mother in Israel” (Judg. 5:7 NKJV). **When women nurture community life, a church seems to have more desire and determination to resolve conflicts and live in harmony with one another.**

## LEARNING COMMUNITY FROM JESUS

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach. (Mark 3:13–14)

Jesus called His leadership team to be with Him. The relationship preceded the task. Then He “began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff” (Mark 6:7–8). Jesus knew they needed each other, but they needed more—they needed Him. They needed to depend on His authority and His provision to do what they were called to do.

Ecclesiastes beautifully depicts this unseen but essential component of covenant community relationships:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Eccl. 4:9–12)

These verses remind us of the necessity of fellowship and that our earthly relationships need to be bound together by the unseen cord of our common relationship with Jesus. Jesus described life-taking leadership when He said, “They [the scribes and Pharisees] preach, but do not practice . . . They do all their deeds to be seen by others . . . and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others” (Matt. 23:3–7). Then, after pronouncing woes on the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus gives a tender picture of a life-giving leader who nurtures community.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37)

**Jesus is a gatherer, and so are those who lead others to Him.**

It was over fifty years ago, but I (Susan) remember it well. We were newly married. My husband was a seminary student on a preaching assignment, and we were to spend Saturday night with a family in the church. As we drove up the long drive to a lovely home, I was nervous. And then I saw her—a woman running out the door with a huge smile and her arms wide open to gather us. I had never been to that town or seen that woman, but I had a strong sensation of being at home, of belonging. I decided on the spot that I wanted to do that for anyone who would ever come into our home and our church; I wanted to be a gatherer.

## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the culture of covenant community life. The theme of unity-in-diversity is woven throughout this remarkable chapter. Notice the contrast of life-giving and life-taking cultures.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (vv. 4–7)

- Life-giving leaders are grateful for the diversity of gifts God gives and are committed to blending their gifts with the gifts of others for the common good.
- Life-taking leaders are threatened by diversity.

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (v. 11)

- Life-giving leaders have a deep dependence on the Lord because they know it is only by the power of His Spirit that we can use our gifts for His glory.
- Life-taking leaders depend on themselves.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. (vv. 12, 14–15)

- Life-giving leaders nurture a blessed belongingness that energizes people to use their gifts for the common good.
- Life-taking leaders are cliquish.

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. (v. 18)

- Life-giving leaders are grateful for every member of their church because they recognize them as God’s gift to their church family.
- Life-taking leaders resent and are annoyed by some people.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” (v. 21)

- Life-giving leaders have a sweet interdependence on each other.
- Life-taking leaders value independence and autonomy.

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. (vv. 24–25)

- Life-giving leaders do not place degrees of value on various gifts.
- Life-taking leaders foster a spirit of competition by valuing some gifts over others.

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (vv. 26–27)

- Life-giving leaders rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep because their hearts are knit together in love. (Rom. 12:15; Col. 2:2)
- Life-taking leaders keep emotional distance from others.

Many people are in life-taking cultures in school, the workplace, their neighborhood, and sometimes at home. **The church has the potential—the authority and provision of Jesus—to provide a radically different experience from the culture.** The church is a place where people are gathered under the wings of Jesus, the eagles’ wings that “brought you to myself” (Ex. 19:4). The church should be a place where we are hidden in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who do me harm (Psalm 17:8–9) and where “under his wings you will find refuge” (Psalm 91:4). The church should be the place where those “who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal. 4:2).

In that sweet and safe place, we are energized to use our gifts for the common good and for God’s glory.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Do you lean more toward being a life-giver or life-taker in your leadership role?
- How can you personally be proactive in guarding against conflict and division?
- How can your ministry build a community of love that can withstand attacks on its unity?
- What are ways your ministry can gather people like Jesus did and lead them to Him?

# She Is Transformed from a Life-Taker

BY KAREN HODGE

*The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. . . . Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." . . . And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him."*

—GENESIS 3:20; 4:1, 25

I am still trying to figure out who I am going to be when I grow up. How about you? Do you sense a need for a change? We face grown-up situations, but deep down there is a little girl inside us who wonders when she will mature. **You will never understand who God is transforming you to be until you understand how God designed you to be. And you will never appreciate your need for a Savior until you understand how your design has been distorted and deterred by the Fall.**

*You will never understand who God is transforming you to be until you understand how God designed you to be. And you will never appreciate your need for a Savior until you understand how your design has been distorted and deterred by the Fall.*

The Fall is the tragic intrusion of sin and death resulting in the brokenness of everything and everyone. The Fall, like creation, begins with words from the enemy of our souls, Satan, the ultimate life-taker. He promised benefits but delivered burdens. Sin distorts our perspective (how we view God) and our purpose (what He is calling us to be) as a woman. We are called to think biblically about all of life. Eve doubted God's goodness and His character, which justified her doubting His will for her life. **Wrong thinking leads to wrong living.** She chose independence over dependence on God and interdependence with Adam. She chose death both spiritually and physically. She listened to the words of the life-taker rather than the Life-giver.

But there is hope! We see the "I will do what I want" of Adam and Eve contrasted with the sovereignly initiated "I will" of God. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and

between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). In the covenant of grace, the Life-giver promises He will crush the head of the life-taker. With the death sentence still ringing in the air, God sovereignly declared life!

Naming, a privilege of headship, was forfeited when Adam disobeyed. The gospel restores Adam’s authority. Eve is currently post-Fall and pre-biological motherhood. It is at this moment she is declared to be a life-giver (Gen. 3:20). The name life-giver is not so much about what we do but who we are. It points to our need for a new life. This redemptive capacity is far more than biological. **Every redeemed woman can be transformed from life-taker to life-giver in any relationship and situation.**

We tend to have a myopic view of mothering. We limit it to women who have birthed biologically. But what about single women or barren women? The covenant way is bigger and bolder. Every redeemed woman is a life-giver. The exponential power of her mission to be fruitful and multiply has now been restored.

*Every redeemed woman can be transformed from life-taker to life-giver in any relationship and situation.*

As we move into chapter four of Genesis, Eve expresses her hope with the birth of Cain: “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” She had no way of knowing that the baby she held in her arms would grow up to be a murderer. In the rest of chapter four, we see her seed is not the Seed of Promise as she and Adam thought. The way of Cain is characterized by death, autonomy, and self-rule. We need the way of Christ to redeem the way of Cain. We need true spiritual transformation. In verse 25, Eve’s reference point shifts back to God: “Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.’”

**The movement from the *I* orientation to the *Godward* orientation is the movement from life-taker to life-giver. As the *I* decreases, it must be replaced by the increasing presence of Christ in our hearts.**

The death of *I* can be painful and slow, but it is through death where one finds the promise of life. Transformation is often complicated but, in the end, glorious. The battle between Satan and the Promised Seed of the woman is reflected in the battle for us to move from being life-takers to life-givers. Victory is accomplished when we trust and obey the conquering Seed of the woman rather than listen to the lies of Satan.

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

- Can you identify any lies that you're believing from the life-taker Satan?
- Where are you in the process of being transformed from life-taker to life-giver? Identify the ways Christ is changing you from a life-taker to a life-giver and thank Him.
- What can you do to orient your life around God more than self?
- Ask God to show you someone you can ask to walk with you on this journey.

# She Dies to Self in Order to Lead

BY KAREN HODGE

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”*

—JOHN 12:24–26

I was twenty-nine and I arrived green at the leadership laboratory. I had been married six years and had a two-year-old and a six-month-old child. I could stop right there in my story and begin to tell you all the life-giving leadership lessons I learned in those early years. But let’s add that my husband and I were embarking on planting a church from scratch in a town where we knew no one. Add all that together and you have the seedbed for some fertile leadership development.

Church planting was the dirt where God planted me to transform me. You see, I was a seed that was planted deep down in the soil of sanctification. In order for me to grow, He was calling me to break open and die for new life to emerge. I had been involved in church my whole life and had quite a few good Sunday school answers in my back pocket should a need arise. But when over half of our church membership came through conversion, all my trite easy answers flew out the window.

Many days I would find myself in the seed casing of fear. Yet my Savior called me to die to my fears and step out in faith. There was the fear of man, the fear of failure, and the fear of the unknown.

- When things flopped, I had to die to my reputation when I wanted to defend it.
- When we were on plan Z (you know, the one you get to when plans A, B, C, . . . fizzled), I had to die to my plans, dreams, and agendas.
- When my house, calendar, and finances were taxed to the max, I had to die to my comfort.
- When someone needed a listening ear, there was the call to die to convenience.
- Most importantly, I learned that life-giving leadership is the call to die to my sin and be the chief repenter.



Death is sacrificial and costly. And as Jesus reminds us, it is daily: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus was getting ready to model this garden story because He shared it just before He went to the cross.

**Life-giving leadership is not just an invitation to serve, but at the most fundamental level, it is an invitation to die. We have to die to live, and we have to die to lead.** I get it, death is painful and scary, but it is also necessary and glorious for His life to be formed in us. When we yield to this calling we can say like Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

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Have you considered where your plot of dirt is located? It is different for each one of us. Over the years the plot size may change, but our calling will not. As the plant grows, the call is to abide. “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). **Life-giving leaders progressively die to self, abide in Jesus, and confidently bear gospel fruit for His glory. Being a life-giving leader is becoming like Him in His death so that others may see Him in us. Apart from this, we can do nothing as a leader.**

*Life-giving leaders progressively die to self, abide in Jesus,  
and confidently bear gospel fruit for His glory.*

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Where is your plot of dirt located?
- Are there areas in your life that Jesus is calling you to die so that you can lead? What are they?
- Who is someone who models dying to self and abiding in Christ? What can you learn from this person?
- Spend time thanking God for the gospel fruit you have seen in your life and in the lives of those around you.

# *She Is Christ-Confident*

BY KAREN HODGE

*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”  
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ  
may rest upon me.*

—2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

I love spending time with young moms. Recently I went to breakfast with an expectant mother. She began to tell me about all the books she had been reading in preparation for the baby’s arrival. “Do you think you are ready?” I sheepishly asked. I too thought I was good to go before the birth of my first child. Just days into parenthood, the quote “all prayer is desperate prayer” became a reality in my life. I had been an inner-city first-grade teacher prior to becoming a mother to Anna Grace. One afternoon when my husband returned home I asked, “How can teaching twenty-five six-year-olds be easier than parenting this baby?” Parenting brought me to my knees.

It offers the occasion to examine exactly where our confidence lies. The word confidence actually comes from the words “with” and “faith.” When you put them together, you get the gist of confidence—with full faith or trust. As a parent, I often placed my full trust in my perceived skills or abilities. Other days it was merely my confidence that I was stubborn enough to endure. As a leader, I was looking inside instead of looking up. Paul tells us plainly, “Put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). **The fundamental difference between life-taking and life-giving leadership is the object of our confidence. A life-giving leader has full confidence in God.**

*The fundamental difference between life-taking  
and life-giving leadership is the object of our confidence.  
A life-giving leader has full confidence in God.*

Self-confidence clings to external assurances. Christ-confidence clings to grace. We cling there because His grace is sufficient. It means He is enough, so we don’t have to try to be. His grace is sufficient to cover my sin of self-reliance and pride. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to appear weak. I want others to see me as strong. The act of full trust is bringing our weakness to Him as a sacrifice of praise. Our weakness is a platform where His strength

shines. It is as if the Lord is saying, “The weaker you are, the more evident My strength will be to a watching world as I deliver and sustain you.” It is hard to comprehend that His power is perfected in our weakness. Perfected means the goal, the purpose, or the aim. Can you believe it? God is actually accomplishing His purposes in our weakness. If you are feeling weak and fearful, friend, then praise God!

I first heard the words to the song “His Strength Is Perfect” by Stephen Curtis Chapman when I was a young mom. The lyrics would roll around in my head on those oh-so-weak days. “His strength is perfect when our strength is gone; He will carry us when we can’t carry on. Raised in His power, the weak become strong; His strength is perfect, His strength is perfect.” These words still ring true today.

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

- Can you remember a time when you put “confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3)? What were the results? How might it have turned out differently?
- How would your leadership change if you put your full faith and trust in Christ instead of yourself?
- Consider memorizing 2 Corinthians 12:9 to remind you that God’s power shines through your weakness.
- Spend time praising God for supplying His strength when you’ve been weak.

# She Serves for God's Glory Not Self-Glory

BY KAREN HODGE

*Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' ... The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."*

—EXODUS 33:18-19; 34:6-7

I am not going to lie; I have cried more than a few times as a leader. There have been times I shed tears in what felt like the wilderness. God has also placed difficult, dare I even say, stiff-necked people in my life. But the place God calls us, and the people He gives us, is no accident. There are times I wanted to trade them both in, but I am slowly learning they are both intended for our good and His glory.

Moses was a focused leader. He was focused not on others, not on self, but on God's glory. He loved this obstinate flock enough to plead with God on their behalf. He focused on God's character and His covenant promise that they were His people. God's gracious response was, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:14). What Moses knew God's presence to be is what distinguishes His people from all the other people on earth.

*What we pray for reveals the depth of our understanding of God's character.*

**What we pray for reveals the depth of our understanding of God's character.** When I am weary and frustrated as a leader, honestly, my first prayer is not for God's presence. So not only are there tears, but often there is more whining than worshiping. My prayers sound more like, *Move me or move them. Deliver me from this mess!* I intercede for my deliverance rather than interceding for my people. I cry out for comfort and convenience. Moses cried out, "Show me Your glory!"

So, if I had been the leader of God's people at that point, I probably would have commenced with the list making. *Now God is going with us; here is a ten-step map to get us to the Promised Land.* **God did not give Moses a plan; He revealed His person. He knew Moses and his people didn't need different circumstances or different people, he needed a different perspective. The people and the place were part of God's merciful plan to show Moses what he really needed—more of Himself.**

God placed Moses in a cleft where he could see only what he could handle, the back side of His glory. God reveals the essence of His character—His mercy, grace, steadfast love, and faithfulness. God shows Himself as Yahweh, His personal name whereby He binds Himself to His people in covenant loyalty. God displays His covenant love and mercy to His people despite their sin. This is what Moses needed to know. He knew he could not depend on the people to keep the covenant. **The only way he could continue to live with and lead stiff-necked people was to gaze at the glorious goodness of God and reflect His glory to them.**

*They radiate the glory of God because they live in His presence.  
Their prayer is for ongoing grace to reflect the brightness of  
God's character, even in the wilderness, to stiff-necked people.*

**What do life-giving leaders look like? What is the core of their character? They radiate the glory of God because they live in His presence. Their prayer is for ongoing grace to reflect the brightness of God's character, even in the wilderness, to stiff-necked people.** If you, like me, have been blamed, criticized, and dismissed by stiff-necked people, be encouraged. Becoming a life-giver is a lifelong adventure of being transformed by the renewing of our minds into the image of Christ. This transformation is pervasive, profound, and progressive. We don't always have a plan. We don't know the solution. We are not sufficient for the task, but "beholding the glory of the Lord [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). We become what we behold.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

- When ministry is hard, what is your first response? Does it sound more like whining or worshipping?
- How will you guard your heart from seeking self-glory?
- Spend time interceding for the "stiff-necked" people you lead. Ask God for grace to reflect the brightness of His glory to them.
- Write out the traits of God's character that are most precious to you right now. Praise Him for who He is, then pray for Him to make you more like Jesus.

# Contributors



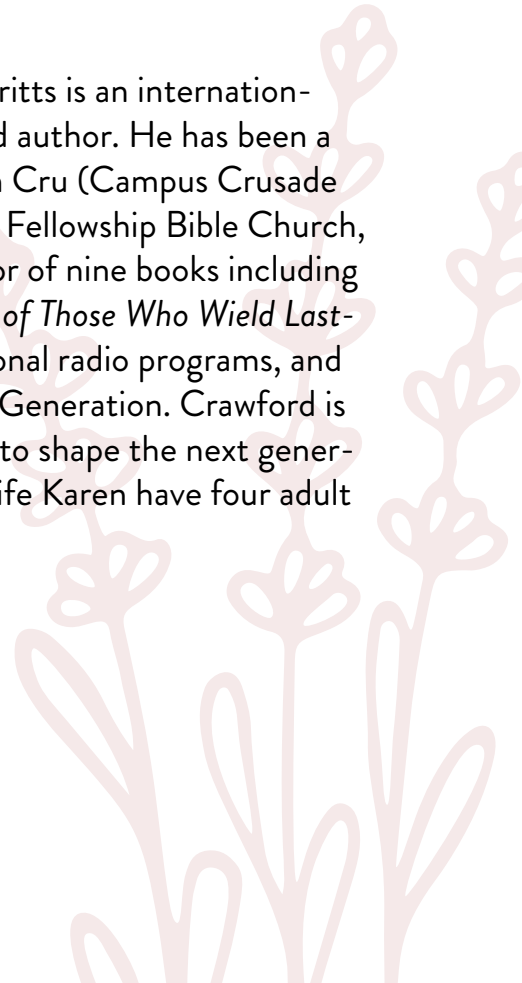
**Karen Hodge**—Karen Hodge serves as the Women’s Ministry Coordinator for the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America). Her joy is to connect women and churches to one another and to sound resources. She is also having the time of her life serving alongside her husband, pastor, and best friend Chris Hodge, Senior Pastor at Village Seven Presbyterian in Colorado Springs. Chris and Karen have two adult children. She is the host of the enCourage podcast, and coauthor of *Transformed: Life-Taker to Life-Giver* and *Life-Giving Leadership*.



**Susan Hunt**—Susan Hunt is the widow of Gene Hunt, the mother of three and grandmother of thirteen, and former Coordinator of Women’s Ministry for the Presbyterian Church in America. She has written several books for women including *Life-Giving Leadership* coauthored with Karen Hodge and *Aging with Grace: Flourishing in an Anti-Aging Culture* coauthored with Sharon Betters. She loves time with her family, sitting on her porch with younger women, and tending the flowers her grandsons help her plant in her yard.



**Dr. Crawford Loritts**—Dr. Crawford Loritts is an internationally acclaimed Bible teacher, pastor, and author. He has been a church planter, served for 27 years with Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) and 15 years as Sr. Pastor of Fellowship Bible Church, Roswell, Georgia. Crawford is the author of nine books including *Leadership as an Identity: The Four Traits of Those Who Wield Lasting Influence*. He is the host of two national radio programs, and President and Founder of Beyond Our Generation. Crawford is committed to encouraging and helping to shape the next generation of Christian leaders. He and his wife Karen have four adult children and eleven grandchildren.



# Notes

“She Cultivates a Life-Giving Community” is adapted from *Life-Giving Leadership* by Karen Hodge and Susan Hunt. Used with permission.

Karen Hodge and Susan Hunt, *Life-giving Leadership* (Lawrenceville: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2018), 124–129.



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