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**Issue #339 11/28/2007**

## **Confessions of a driven pastor (Part One)**

by Lance Witt

I know the conflicted feeling of standing up to preach and knowing that my own soul is empty and dry. I know what it is to do ministry fueled only by experience and obligation. I know what it is to feed others while neglecting to feed myself.

Proverbs 14:8 says, "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception." It is healthy for those of us who serve in ministry to regularly push the pause button and "give thought" to our ways. It is good for us to do an honest diagnosis. Solomon says you are a fool to live in self-deception. So, let me ask you to *give thought* to the ways of your ministry. As you plot the trajectory of your life and soul, where does it lead?

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*“It’s no longer safe to assume that people in ministry have healthy souls and just need a little coaching in the leadership area.”*

Pastor Lance Witt

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I have been a Christ follower for more than 35 years and in full-time ministry for more than 25 years. I know my own struggles, and I work with pastors most every day. It is no longer safe to assume that we as Christian leaders are doing well while doing good. It is no longer safe to assume that people in ministry have healthy souls and just need a little coaching in the leadership area.

### **The danger of image management**

I have learned over the years that there are some toxins inherent to modern ministry that can poison my soul. Ministry, which we would assume would enhance our relationship with God, can actually become a threat to our relationship with God. Ministry poisons can be subtle, but insidious. They can feed your ego and fuel your ministry success while wrecking your soul.

One such ministry toxin is "image management." We all know what it is to feel the need to prop up an external image that doesn't match the internal reality of our soul. It's like getting a facelift when you have cancerous tumor living inside you.

The danger is that we can get used to it, comfortable with it, and adept at playing the image management game. The truth is, you don't have to have a healthy soul to be seen as a success in ministry. But you are walking in a ministry minefield when your outward success begins to outpace your character.

Many years ago while I was in school in Dallas, there was an old YMCA building right across the street from where I attended class. They wanted to take down the old dilapidated building in order to erect a skyscraper. There were several other large buildings on the same block with some with historic value, so they couldn't just indiscriminately start pounding away with a wrecking ball. This job required a different strategy.

For weeks everything on the outside looked very normal and remained unchanged. The only thing we noticed was the regular flow of workers in hard hats. After several weeks, we heard that the plan was to implode the building. I will never forget going downtown on the Saturday morning they were going to destroy the building. They had barricaded the streets and cleared all

traffic from the area. With no advance notice, the charges were detonated. We heard the blast, but for a few seconds it looked like nothing was happening. Then, the walls began to crack and give way, and the whole structure fell to the ground in a cloud of dust.

That scene reminds me of a lot of people I have observed in ministry (including myself). On the exterior, you would think everything is going well. However, internally, imperceptibly, something destructive is happening. They are being dismantled from the inside, and they are headed for an implosion.

At our core, none of us wants to play the image management game. It's stressful, time consuming, duplicitous, and plastic. We really want our lives to be marked by *Esse quam videri*. No, that's not a typo. These Latin words were on the coat of arms of early church Father Gregory Nazianzen. They mean *to be rather than appear to be*.

I remember sitting in Milwaukee about five years ago with a group of seasoned Christian leaders. One white-haired man at the table was probably in his upper 60s and had served in ministry 40 years. I will never forget the words that quietly but powerfully rolled off his lips that day. He said, "The older I get, the less concern I have with what I have or have not done and the more concern I have for what I have or have not become."

The older I get, the more I resonate with his wisdom. The older I get, the more I realize that the greatest gift I give those I lead is my own authentic walk with Jesus.

#### **Four ways to avoid spiritual drift**

Certainly there is no magic pill that ensures a healthy spiritual life. But here are four ideas that might help you on your ministry journey.

**1. Get brutally honest with yourself.** Stare this issue in the face. Ask, "What is the condition of my soul?" Look for signs of spiritual toxins.

**2. Take ownership of your own spiritual life.** Don't play the victim card. Don't play the "this is just a busy season" card. You can't blame the condition of your soul on your staff, elders, board of directors, or spouse. You are responsible to lead yourself.

**3. Identify the things that fill your soul.** What refreshes you spiritually? What replenishes your soul? What refuels you emotionally? Do whatever you have to in order to make room for these things in your life.

**4. Find a soul mate.** Look for a friend who will encourage and kindle spiritual passion in you.

You have a soul. It's who you are at your deepest core. It's eternal. Pay attention to it and nurture it.

Article by Lance Witt

Lance Witt is the founder of [Replenish Ministry](#) and a former executive pastor at Saddleback Church.

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