

4: LEADING CAN GET LONELY

By John
In Character, Pressure, Resilience

6 Min Read



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Mask of Success Series: When Winning Isn't Enough

OPENING THOUGHT

Every man wants to lead—until he realizes leadership can be a lonely place. Leadership has its rewards, but it's ups and downs as well—it comes with a unique kind of loneliness. You're responsible for decisions that affect others. You're looked to for strength, vision, and resolve. But who checks in on you? Who really knows what's going on beneath the surface?

Our country is experiencing a dangerous loneliness epidemic. 15% of men responding to a Western Oregon University study said they have no close friends. In an Aspen Valley Health study, 27% of men reported having just six or more close friends. In the Western Oregon

University study, 20% of boys/young men said that no one knew them well. And finally, Gallup reported that 25% of men revealed being lonely most or all of the previous day.

Let's take a closer look at why leaders experience isolation.

Loneliness increases with leadership. The higher you climb, the lonelier it can get. I've felt it. Leadership comes with expectations—our expectations and those of the other team members. Be the steady one, the strong one, the guy with answers. You've got all the answers. You know where the team is headed. Nothing's going to stop you from completing the project. Why do we carry weight we were never meant to carry alone? Leadership doesn't exempt us from loneliness—it can actually multiply it. Why aren't we at the feet of the cross more often?

Brotherhood is not the same as surface-level friendship. Making brothers takes work. Surface-level friendships are easy to maintain. Friendship conversations can be summed up in the two words most men use on Sunday mornings when asked how they're doing—"Okay," and "Fine." Talking about work, sports, and weekend plans is safer. Brothers dig deeper. Brothers share battles, troubles, and struggles. Friends talk about life, brothers live it together. Brotherhood costs more, but the benefits outweigh the effort expended.

Men in leadership often don't feel safe being vulnerable – even in church. Change that to "especially in church." Productivity frequently gives the illusion of purpose while quietly keeping people at a distance. When a man fills every moment with tasks, meetings, and goals, it's not always about achievement—it's often about avoidance. If you're always busy, there's no time for hard conversations, emotional vulnerability, or deep relationships. It becomes a socially acceptable way to hide, even from yourself. Eventually, the work gets done, but the soul stays untouched.

Productivity is often used as a shield to avoid connection. Many high-performance men hide behind the excuse of being "busy." I've done it, and maybe you have too. Leadership slowly replaces friendship, and productivity displaces intimacy. The transition is imperceptible. One moment you're leading men up to the mountain top, and the next you're on your way to burnout. We've confused activity with connection. We work shoulder-to-shoulder with other men and can hardly remember their names.

Here's the Leadership Lie – "I can't afford to be seen as weak."

Men learn early on that leaders keep it together. Solid performance. No weaknesses. Just strength. Never asking for help and pretending you're okay doesn't make you strong—it makes you alone. Real strength isn't about putting on your game face. It's about inviting God into it. Moses broke down. David cried out. Paul boasted in weakness. Leadership isn't about perfection—it's about leaning on God and others.

You don't need to lead alone. And you were never meant to.

SCRIPTURE

“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!”
—Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (ESV)

This verse hits hard because it's still true today. The people in Jesus' time weren't villains—they were ordinary men trying to navigate cultural pressure and public image. But somewhere along the way, they began valuing man's approval more than God's. Sound familiar?

Jesus didn't look for a stage life. In fact, He often withdrew from the crowds. His mission wasn't popularity—it was obedience. Even when the cheers turned into jeers, He stayed focused on the Father's voice.

So, why do we measure our worth by the noise around us instead of the still, sure whisper of our Creator?

APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes reminds us that we were never meant to go it alone. Two are better than one—not just for practical reasons, but for emotional survival. When one falls, the other can help them up. But what if there's no one there?

The business world celebrates the self-made man. Church culture can sometimes do the same—elevating the visible leader while overlooking the man underneath the title. You can be admired and unknown at the same time. That's a dangerous place to live for too long.

Jesus led crowds, sure. But He also had a small circle—Peter, James, and John. Even Jesus, in His humanity, sought out community. In His darkest moments, He asked them to stay close.

So why do we convince ourselves we don't need the same?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE: CHANGE YOUR FOCUS

Text one man today. Not to talk about work, sports, or politics. Just to ask, “How are you really doing?” Maybe it's a guy in your small group. A former mentor. A friend who's drifted. Don't interrupt. Don't change the subject. Keep it simple. Just listen.

Or maybe it's time to answer that question for yourself first.

Then pray this:

“Father, help me to seek your insight and wisdom as I lead. Keep me from the dangers pride can bring to leadership. May I serve You and others with the right motivation. Teach me to live for Your applause alone.”

FINAL THOUGHT

Leadership doesn't have to be lonely. You don't have to carry it all silently. God didn't design you to lead in isolation—He created you for connection. Isolation can cause emotional, spiritual, and even physical health issues.

The world tells men to stay strong. God invites men to remain honest.

This week's step: Pick one moment this week to let another man in. Over coffee, or during a call—share, where you are, be real, let your guard down. It's a lie that leaders cannot be seen as weak. No one is invincible. Let someone help you up. We weren't meant to stand alone.

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