

The Salvation Army: June 2019 Article

Fragmentation to Integration

By Jim Van Yperen

“Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a Heaven creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself.”

C.S. Lewis, The Joyful Christian

To separate or integrate?

Crisis offers a window into your soul. Are you willing to look through it?

To explore this, I would like to ask you a question, guess an answer and see if the description might help enlighten your situation . . .

Question: Why are you in ministry?

We've asked many Christian leaders this question and have heard a lot of amazing answers; stories about calling, a burden for the gospel and all manner of doing the most good for others in Christ's name. The answers we've heard are compelling and real.

But our research points to another story that may play a far greater role in shaping why you do what you do: your desire.

Your call to ministry may be sincerely directed toward helping others but being a ministry leader is profoundly important to you as well. Specifically, you are in ministry because you are seeking to fill a desire that you want more than anything else. When rightly ordered, your desire is a normal, healthy human need, such as the need to be loved, to belong, to be respected, safe or affirmed. Desire runs deep in your call. Can you accept that?

Here is how desire works:

Desire offers a promise and weaves a story you have learned to tell yourself that may go something like this, “If I only had _____, I'd be more _____.” How have you completed this sentence? Think back through your life. Remember when you wanted to make the athletic team or join the band? Or, when you couldn't wait to get into (or out of) high school? Got your driver's license? Went to college? Dated? Got married? Found a job?

Why? What were you looking for? Relationship? Freedom? Power? What story were you telling yourself?

Leaders who come to faith late in life often have their desire exposed and redeemed, then go on to lead with self-awareness and humility. But leaders who came to faith young, while their desires were being formed, are often unaware of or unable to separate their desire from God's. These leaders can enter and go a long way in ministry moving from one goal to another, guided and measured around a story that points back to some unredeemed desire.

Desire is why you do what you do and, when disordered, where you are most likely to fail.

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A desire becomes disordered when you look to a position, or people or circumstances for what only God can provide. Jesus must be Lord over all, including and especially desire. Disordered desire creates an idol that desires to master you by motivating your leadership, measuring your value and, ultimately, separating you from God and others. You become fragmented, torn between your genuine desire to serve others and your starved need to be loved, accepted, or respected. When something or someone threatens to take away or harm what you long for most, you enter crisis. Emotion immediately overwhelms you. You react quickly, saying and doing things to “fix” the problem, make the threat go away. You will do this even when you know your words and actions are wrong or will hurt your spouse, those you are serving or working with. You might justify your actions or feel remorse, confess or cover-up, but the crisis will be repeated as long as your desire remains unredeemed.

Crisis forces decision. Do I separate or integrate? The decision you make will reveal what you truly believe—about who you are in Christ and Who Christ is in you.

The word integration shares the same root as integrity, from the Latin “integer” meaning something untouched, undivided or whole. So, a well-integrated leader or ministry team is one that is whole, who literally has “integrity.” Separation occurs when integrity or oneness is broken. Relationships are utilitarian, not whole. Team members may articulate the same beliefs and goals, but their motivations are individual. Any perceived threat can split people apart, fragmenting the team.

There are people on your team right now who are captive to their disordered desire. You may be one of them. You thought the problem must be aptitude or capacity, so you sought out more skill-based training or engaged in team building exercises. But the problem remains. Perhaps it is time for another path.

Choosing integration means choosing to discover and speak truth, about ourselves and one another. It is honest, open conversation about our desires; what motivates us, what threatens us. You might start, for example, with asking yourself or your team to complete the sentence, “If I only had _____, I’d be more _____.” Explore why you think this, where it comes from, how long have you thought this way. Review a list of common desires, such as love, belonging, respect, affirmation, acceptance, safety, power, trust and freedom and name the desire. Look up scriptures to learn how God can fulfill this desire and how all other sources can lead to distortion. Confess and pray for one another. Agree together about how people can affirm one another’s needs while holding each other accountable to our disordered idols.

--Jim Van Yperen