

The background of the cover is a light cream color with numerous thin, wavy, golden-brown lines that flow horizontally across the entire page, creating a textured, organic feel.

THE SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY LEADER

Finding Freedom from Self-Sabotage

DAVE WIEDIS

“I wish I had read this book years ago when I was in a public spiritual leadership role—it could have saved a lot of heartache.”

Ruth Graham, Author of *Transforming Loneliness* and *Forgiving My Father, Forgiving Myself*

“Every Christian leader, including legislators and public servants, will benefit from the sound biblical principles that are presented in this gold mine of wisdom.”

Mike Johnson, Speaker of the US House of Representatives

Kelly Johnson, Licensed Pastoral Counselor

“Dave Wiedis offers safe and candid medicine for the heart of the servant leader. A good read and great gift for the called and chosen.”

Dr. Alveda King, Speak for Life

“Pastors, scholars, Sunday school teachers, and Christians leading in the home will be challenged, encouraged, and enriched by this thoughtful, tender illumination of the throne room of the soul.”

Dr. Peter A. Lillback, President, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

“As both a professional counselor and pastor, I know the value of this self-examination both for ministry leaders and those they serve and highly recommend this book.”

Winston T. Smith, Rector, St. Anne’s Church Abington

“This book uncovers the hidden struggles of ministry, offering profound biblical wisdom and practical insight to help leaders overcome and find freedom from self-sabotage in Christ.”

Tim Clinton, President and CEO, American Association of Christian Counselors

“With the compassionate heart of a wise biblical counselor, Wiedis addresses the very core of what drives people and controls their decision-making.”

Shelby Abbott, Author; speaker; campus minister

“Dave has penned a thorough framework that holds promise for deep transformation and is very practical for becoming a spiritually healthy leader.”

Paul Kuzma, Director and Board-Certified Pastoral Counselor, Center for Spiritual Renewal

“*The Spiritually Healthy Leader* is for all believers who desire to confront the ruling passions that keep their hearts from an uninhibited, authentic relationship with Jesus.”

Jimmy Dodd, Founder, PastorServe; author

“In the *Spiritually Healthy Leader*, Dave Wiedis is the experienced counselor you need to enjoy greater freedom, loving relationships, and flourishing ministry.”

Drs. Bill and Kristi Gaultiere, Founders, Soul Shepherding; authors of *Journey of the Soul*

"If taken seriously, this book will change you, then release you to be the leader you were meant to be."

Michael John Cusick, CEO, Restoring the Soul; author of *Sacred Attachment*

"*The Spiritually Healthy Leader* is a master work. I cannot believe how biblical, personable, and insightful it is."

Rick James, Founder, Cru Press; Publisher, Ratio Christi Press

"This book combines deep spiritual insights with practical steps to help Christian leaders in any capacity gain true freedom in Christ."

Michael Geer, President, Pennsylvania Family Institute, Harrisburg, PA

"Dave Wiedis provides real, workable tools and God-centered solutions to help leaders find freedom from self-sabotage. This will minister to many—pastors, counselors, mentors, and more."

Alan Sears, Founder, Alliance Defending Freedom

"Reading and digesting this book will save many pastors from self-sabotage and spare many churches and marriages from needless destruction."

Joe Watkins, Host, *State of Independence*, Lighthouse TV

"*The Spiritually Healthy Leader* provides an offramp from the Romans 7 hamster wheel."

Karl Benzio, Medical Director, American Association of Christian Counselors

"I am thrilled about Dave's new book, which is a must-read for anyone in church leadership or who aspires to be a ministry leader."

John Freeman, Founder, Harvest USA; author of *Hide or Seek*

"Dave Wiedis is a mature, kingdom leader whose impact has earned him a voice in the body of Christ. No one is better equipped to address the subject of healthy spiritual leadership."

Fred Hartley, Lead Pastor, One Mission Church; president, College of Prayer

"In *The Spiritually Healthy Leader*, Dave Wiedis helps us unearth and guard against the hidden drives that destroy a leader's effectiveness and legacy."

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"If you want to grow in your Christian walk and live a truly honest, healthy spiritual life, take the time to read this—it will change your life!"

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"In a world of how-to books, this is an important exploration first and foremost of the root causes of spiritual health or unhealth."

Roy A. Yanke, Executive Director, PIR Ministries

“Providing biblical application to the discovery of our own ruling passions, Wiedis helps bring transformation to make Christ our ultimate passion.”

Dr. Bruce A. McDowell, President, Santiago Theological Seminary,
Santiago, Dominican Republic

“With piercing honesty and profound wisdom, this book offers practical tools to address blind spots and ruling passions that can quietly sabotage leaders.”

Matthew Maher, Pastor, Landmark Church, NJ

“Dave Wiedis has walked alongside enough struggling pastors to be able to guide us to the heart of what we need—a heart open to the Spirit’s transformation of our desires.”

Rev. Dr. Sam A. Andreades, Pastor; author

“This transformative guide ensures God’s glory remains our driving passion. With transparency and grace, Dave models the freedom found in embracing our identity as those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Dr. Kevin M. Flannery, Senior Pastor, Church of the Saviour, Wayne,
PA

“My congregation, our elders, and other leaders have been undone and then redone by the gospel wisdom found in this book. A great discipleship tool for heart transformation!”

Jonathan David Olsen, Senior Pastor, Grace and Peace Community
Church, Philadelphia, PA

“The principles outlined in this book have made a game-changing difference in my life and ministry.”

Bruce Finn, Former Coordinator of Church Planting, The Presbyterian
Church in America, Philadelphia

“Dave Wiedis masterfully leads you to understand how ruling passions hinder your relationships with God, friends, and family, and he equips you to engage in an intimate, honest connection with the Lord.”

Sue Corl, Executive Director, Crown of Beauty International; author

“Dave Wiedis helped me see God’s grace at work rescuing me from my familiar escapes and idolatries with insight, humility, and a heart for me as a pastor.”

Andy Farmer, Pastor; author

“With insight that can only come from decades of serving leaders, Dave takes readers on a journey through their hearts and ministers biblical truth to their worn-out souls.”

Jeffrey W. Boettcher, Lead Pastor, Christ Church South Philly; director
of Planting and Partnership, Trinity Fellowship of Churches

“This book is a perfect blend of the tools necessary for leaders to have spiritual health and freedom in Christ while avoiding the traps we set for ourselves.”

Sara R. Dormon, Author; speaker

“There’s a wealth of gospel-wisdom in these pages—for leaders and for all who follow Jesus.”

Peter Nelson, Senior Pastor, Goshen Baptist Church, West Chester, PA

“*The Spiritually Healthy Leader* is filled with Dave’s knowledge to guide leaders toward healing and positive transformation.”

Linda and Ken Koldenhoven, Coauthors of *Connecting Around the Table*; cofounders, Creating For Him

“This is not just an insightful book—it’s a practical, life-changing guide that will help you break free from bondage and step into greater freedom in your leadership and capacity to love.”

Phillip Carnuccio, Lead Pastor, Providence Church, West Chester, PA

“A must-read for any leader who wants to be spiritually successful following Jesus!”

Matthew Pieters, Lead Pastor, BridgePoint Church, Valparaiso, IN

“Dave Wiedis teaches us how to root out our self-serving ruling passions and replace them with God-honoring worship.”

Mark Hough, CRU, People and Culture team, Southeast Region

“Filled with raw honesty and divine hope, this book is the spiritual and emotional equivalent of open-heart surgery. Pick it up and don’t put it down!”

Rick Marshall, PCA pastor; former crusade director for Billy Graham

“If you desire to better understand why you do the things you do and how you can live a transformed life, this is the book for you.”

DJAY Martin, Pastor of Leadership and Vision, Parker Ford Church; lead editor of *Before the Booth*

“In Dave Wiedis’s new book, he uncovers the nuances of the soul of man and gives practical advice for how to live above the traps of our flesh and the schemes of our enemy.”

Jim Maxim, Acts413 Ministries

“*The Spiritually Healthy Leader* is a GPS for hurting ministry leaders, guiding them out of the forest of failure, besetting sin, and misguided emotions.”

Dr. Jeffrey S. Black, Professor Emeritus, Department of Counseling and Psychology, Cairn University

“Dave transparently exposes the ruling passions and idols that derail leaders, offering gospel-centered tools to reorder their desires. Read it now—your integrity, calling, and leadership depend on it.”

Dr. E. Scott Feather, Lead Pastor, Gateway Church, Parkesburg, PA; author

“This book will lead you on a journey of identifying your passions, claiming their validity, and then aligning them before the face of God.”

Patty Hutsko Brown, Grace Church Bethlehem

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FINDING FREEDOM
FROM SELF-SABOTAGE

Dave Wiedis



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THIS IS DEDICATED TO MY WIFE, MIHO,
AND MY CHILDREN, KAHN AND KIYA.

*Your honest reflections have taught me deeply
about my ruling passions. You have lovingly reminded me
that I am more deeply flawed than I believed and yet
more loved than I could ever dare hope. I love you.*



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INTRODUCTION

My best friend, spiritual mentor, and pastor was killed instantly when he drove head-on into a beer truck while on a three-day crack cocaine binge. He was a gifted speaker and theologian, a highly effective teacher, and a respected preacher who explicated biblical truth with unusual clarity and winsomeness. He was a compassionate and skilled counselor. But it was not enough.

It wasn't enough either that he could compose music or skillfully conduct orchestras, or that he was a first-chair trumpet player. His musical gifts and athletic prowess were beyond what I consider fair for any one person to possess; he paralleled on his first ski trip, broke bricks as a white belt, and played competitive tennis and volleyball.

He did everything exceedingly well and yet it was never enough. It wasn't enough that his kids viewed him as a hero, or that his wife was a devoted spouse committed to working out their troubled marriage. When he abandoned his wife, family, and church, it wasn't enough to see the pain in their eyes or to

hear the crushing disappointment and disillusionment of his congregation and friends who loved him. When his cocaine addiction became public, friends from all over the country reached out and offered to pay for rehab and to provide shelter and comfort. After he completed rehab, my wife and I invited him to live with us, incorporated him into our family, and tried to help him through his recovery. Our interventions saved him from a suicide attempt, helped him find a job, and provided a temporary safe place for his troubled mind to rest. That was not enough. The last time I saw him was immediately before he robbed us—while we were away on a family vacation. He went through our entire home and stole our money, valuables, family heirlooms, antiques, and my car, which was later found abandoned in a hotel parking lot in another state. A year later, he was gone.

Hundreds of people attended his funeral. The most common refrain was how this loving, talented pastor, mentor, and friend had such a positive influence in their lives. People testified about how he had led them to Christ and helped deepen their intimacy with God. They shared how his shepherd's heart had comforted them during their times of trouble and loss. His biblical teaching and his ability to listen, counsel, and love had profoundly changed their lives.

My friend's tragic death impacted me deeply. On a personal level, I experienced profound sadness. He influenced my spiritual and emotional life more than any one person on this earth. He was there for me during the most painful and significant events of my life, including my brother's death from a heroin overdose, the rejection I experienced during my heartbreaking divorce, and the rebellious and lonely years during which I had walked away from God to pursue serial monogamy. He listened compassionately to my deepest doubts and insecurities. His love for the truth and intellectual honesty inspired me to adopt

those same traits for myself. He introduced me to and disciplined me in the joyful truths of Reformed theology and helped reset my heart's affections toward God.

My friend's ministry illustrated the powerful impact of a pastor who is wholly submitted to the calling of the gospel and the eternal consequences of that good work. Ministry leaders are in one of the most strategic positions in the universe. They play a unique role in and have the potential to touch thousands—and in some cases millions—of people with the good news of Jesus Christ. Ministry leaders are on the front lines, preaching, teaching, and leading people to Christ. And they do more than preach the gospel—they help apply the gospel to every area of life so that everything they do has an eternal ripple effect on individuals, marriages, families, communities, and nations. Ministry leaders never know if the drug addict or business executive sitting in their pew, when transformed by Christ, will be the next Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Billy Graham, John Stott, Tim Keller, or Dallas Willard.

But deep spiritual transformation in the lives of others is severely jeopardized without the personal transformation of the leader's own heart. And it certainly does not take place if the leader is sabotaged by the idols of his heart. Ministry leaders don't usually implode from outside pressures but rather, the seeds of their destruction are already planted in their hearts, and they are incapacitated from within. As my thoughts returned to my friend's life and death, I was left wondering what events or factors initiated his tragic trajectory that ultimately caused this godly, gifted pastor to engage in such extreme conduct that destroyed his life, close relationships, and the ministry he sacrificed years to build.

In over three decades of experience as an attorney and in pastoral counseling, I have often worked with incredibly talented pastors who are admired for their godly character, dynamic

leadership, and inspiring biblical sermons. Their congregations are impressed with their gifts, preaching, and powerful impact. Yet some of these same gifted leaders have destroyed their ministries and marriages through landmines of relational failure, financial impropriety, sexual immorality, narcissism, dictatorial leadership, or more subtle idols, illicitly fulfilling their longings for affirmation, admiration, control, or adventure.

How many times in the news today have we learned—as I learned about my friend—that a beloved pastor or prominent ministry leader has lost his or her ministry or marriage and brought pain and confusion to the body of Christ due to a misguided series of choices? Often, we are left in shock, shame, and fear. We wonder, *How did this happen?* How can leaders who have been called to ministry and are submitted to the lordship of Christ engage in such overt sinful conduct? What goes on in our hearts that can lead to actions that are antithetical to what we know to be true, and that offend the God we love so much? What lurks beneath the surface that has such power to destroy lives of such promise?

More personally, and more to the point—could this happen to me? To my life, ministry, and family? What goes on in my own heart that is contrary to the gospel, offensive to God, and harmful to myself and those closest to me? Why do I keep struggling with my sinful desires when I long to obey Christ and live a fruitful, loving, grace-giving life? How can I cultivate an “expulsive affection” for Christ that will transform my passions into a powerful, life-giving ministry?¹

And even if a ministry leader is not formally disqualified from ministry, many leaders (and their congregants) who long for a passionate relationship with God can find themselves engaged in an endless cycle of shame and sinful, self-defeating behaviors despite their best intentions.

We don't have to read far in Scripture to see that the Bible is replete with stories of godly men and women who, despite their intimate relationships with God and powerful public ministries, engaged in sinful conduct that wrecked their lives and ministries. David was known as a man after God's heart and yet he abused his power with Bathsheba, engaged in criminal conspiracy, and murdered her husband. Moses was the greatest Old Testament prophet but was denied entry into the promised land due to his anger. Jonah's bitterness and his demand that God implement his own version of justice undermined his ministry to Nineveh.

The premise of this book is that we are designed by God to be driven by a "ruling passion" to live wholeheartedly *coram Deo*, before the face of God. As will be further defined in chapter 1, a ruling passion is an extraordinarily strong desire that rules or controls us such that we make achieving that goal an ultimate priority.

Most Christians, and certainly ministry leaders, *claim* they have a ruling passion to have an intimate, obedient relationship with God and to be ruled by the lordship of Christ. However, there is often a great disparity between what we claim to be most passionate about and what our passions really are. Practically, we struggle in our relationships with others, battle with besetting sins, and are governed by ultimate motivations of the heart that conflict with Christ as Lord.

If you interviewed most ministry leaders and asked them the ultimate heart commitments that either motivated them to enter ministry or currently govern their ministry, you would likely hear statements like these:

- "I want to serve God with my whole life."
- "I want people to hear the gospel."

- “I want to help people know God.”
- “I will go anywhere and do anything to share the gospel.”
- “Obeying God is the most important part of my life, and I will teach others to do the same.”
- “My ministry will be based solely on God’s Word.”
- “Evangelism is the most important endeavor.”

In reality, these aspirational statements are often belied by actual—and often unconscious—ultimate heart commitments that are more accurately summarized by statements like these:

- “I will be liked.”
- “I will be admired.”
- “I will avoid pain.”
- “I will be a peacekeeper.”
- “I will be loved.”
- “I will belong.”
- “I will leave a legacy.”
- “I will unify.”
- “I will be unique.”
- “I will be respected.”
- “I will be in control.”
- “I will have impact.”
- “I will be the expert.”

And this disparity, which grows in proportion to our failure to maintain spiritual and emotional health, can be devastating when lived out to its conclusion in our ministries, marriages, and relationships.

Ministry leaders must recognize the universal truth that anyone is vulnerable to self-sabotage when impure, self-protective heart commitments are adopted. The degree to which we are unaware of our ruling passions is the degree to which we

will engage in idolatry of the heart. This book offers powerful strategies to help identify and understand how, when left unexamined, our ruling passions can serve as functional idols, permeate every aspect of our being, and have the potential to sabotage our relationships, ministry, and life. It is designed to help us identify our blind spots and learn how God can supercharge our ruling passions rather than letting them rule us—by bringing them under Christ’s lordship to experience a radical, grace-filled transformation of our lives.

This book is an invitation to submit your entire being—including your passions—to the transforming work of God so that you will live every aspect of life in complete love for, in obedience to, and under the supremacy of Christ. It is an invitation to live *coram Deo*, before the face of God, so that your passions are transformed and your ruling desire will be to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). When practically lived out, the supremacy of Christ fills your mind, informs your priorities, and governs every aspect of your life and ministry. Then, we can live and walk vibrantly with God, free from self-sabotage of the heart; experience the ripple effect of health and healing in our own lives; and see that effect positively impact our close relationships, families, churches, and the next generation.

The principles in this book are not only for spiritual leaders, but they are also for all who desire to live in Christ. Every person in your church is governed by and will act in conformity with their ruling passions and may be potentially sabotaged by them. As a shepherd you have the special responsibility to lead and disciple them so that their hearts are yielded to the lordship of Christ. As you learn to identify your ruling passions, engage in the process of repentance, and experience deep heart

transformation, you will be better equipped to powerfully minister to and shepherd the hearts of those in your church and ministry.

A CHALLENGE

What you read in this book may surprise and challenge you. You will see aspects of the gospel, yourself, and others that you may have never seen before. It is my hope that it will help you develop a deeper intimacy with God, a greater love for others, and a supercharged desire for—and submission to—the lordship of Christ in every area of life. But it takes honest, deep, prayerful reflection and a willingness to do the hard interior work necessary to deepen your walk with God. It is not easy. Everything within us tends to resist addressing the complicated recesses of our hearts. Consider this observation from Parker Palmer:

That is why we externalize everything—it is far easier to deal with the exterior world. It is easier to spend your life manipulating an institution than dealing with your own soul. We make institutions sound complicated and hard and rigorous, but they are simplicity itself compared with our inner labyrinths.²

Are you ready to give up manipulating your external world and, with the help of God, enter the complex inner labyrinth of your own heart? Are you ready to rule the passions that want to rule you? I'm ready to join you on this journey. I promise that it will be worth it.

PART 1:

The Problem

Chapter 1

A VITAL MISDIAGNOSIS OF OUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

How do you measure spiritual health? By what standards are we to determine the quality of our relationship with God? Christians tend to measure spiritual health in various ways: the length of their prayers, daily Bible reading, church attendance, spiritual gifts, a servant's heart, emotional maturity, or financial generosity.

Although these activities and traits may provide some *superficial* indicators of spiritual health, there is a far deeper, though less precise, way to assess spiritual health. To protect ourselves from a facile definition of spiritual health, we need a more robust framework. In 1677, the Puritan Henry Scougal captured the essence of spiritual health and expressed a way to “assess the beauty of an invisible heart.” He said, “The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.”¹ In other words, we can gain great insight into another's soul by what they are most passionate about, or as Scougal put it, the object of one's love.

What are you most passionate about? What motivates you and elicits the most energy from you? What are your ultimate

commitments? Do you love people, history, music, art, and literature? Are you passionate about marriage and children? Do you focus your energy on cliff diving, exercise, collecting coins, shopping, gardening, or solitude?

Or perhaps your passions are different, less obvious, and potentially darker at their core. Do you find yourself obsessed with an inordinate desire for approval, affection, admiration, adventure, recognition, power, control, or impact?

Our passions reveal much about what we value, who we are, or, as Scougal put it, the “excellency” of our soul. Our answer to the question of what we are most passionate about will have an enormous impact on our life, marriage, and ministry—particularly as a ministry leader who wants to cultivate an intimate relationship with God. Frankly, our answer will put us on a trajectory to either living a life of faithful service to God or sabotaging our life and ministry. The spiritual health, wholeness, and “excellency” of our soul can be measured by who or what we love, where we spend our time and energy, what we dwell on, and what we most passionately pursue with all our might.

Our spiritual health is directly connected to our passions. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). The first commandment tells us that God ought to be our first passion:

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image. . . . You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God.” (Exodus 20:3–5)

Jesus also taught that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

Accordingly, it stands to reason that our spiritual health can be measured by whether we pursue God with all our heart, soul, and mind, whether we love what God loves and pursue what God pursues. Our spiritual health can be measured by what we most prioritize—by what we are most committed to.

Take a poll of most groups of Christians today and ask them what they are most passionate about, and depending on their denomination or church “tribe,” you will most likely hear an array of answers, such as

- correct theology
- the Word of God
- apologetics
- obeying God
- charismatic gifts
- spiritual experiences
- prophetic ministry
- justice, equality, and racial reconciliation
- evangelism
- worship
- church planting
- the body of Christ
- Christian education

While it may be true that they are passionate about these aspects of our faith, are these really the things about which they are *most* passionate? We may claim to be primarily passionate about God, but our moment-by-moment actions often reveal otherwise. Consider the following examples of gifted ministry leaders, all of whom claim a passionate love for Jesus and genuinely seek his lordship in their lives:

- Andy is an executive pastor and oversees a large staff. He always strives to make everyone feel accepted and comfortable and attempts to maintain peace with everyone. He avoids conflict at all costs. When loving confrontation is required, he shirks back in fear. Most recently, Andy ignored a key staff member's repeated poor performance, and the morale of the other staff is at an all-time low.
- Pastor John can teach well and pursues deep relationships. However, he has a propensity to be controlling. In the name of "accountability," he crosses boundaries by demanding access to the personal information of the other leaders in his church by requiring them to answer increasingly personal questions—even to the extent of asking to see their checkbooks or credit card statements and asking about intimate details of their sexual lives.
- As director of outreach, Mary strives to love others well. She seeks the deepest relationships with men; her female roommates report that she is antagonistic to them, underhanded, and impossible to live with. She needs to be the "queen," and when people show any attention to other females, she responds with a cutting anger that seems to come out of nowhere.
- Dan has been a respected elder for many years. He is fiscally responsible and has raised his three sons well. He finds himself uncontrollably drawn to public bathrooms seeking brief sexual encounters with other men. He acts out at least once a week, despite his desire for deep repentance.
- Nancy serves on the staff of a large church. She is artistic and loves serving others—until she inaccurately perceives others have abandoned her. She blows up at them

without any warning. Everyone around her walks on eggshells; they know her anger can go from zero to 100 in a millisecond.

- Jim is an evangelist who receives much adulation for his powerful and effective ministry. At home, he is a gentle tyrant. Everyone must focus on his needs. Even when he appears to move toward his wife and teenage children, he makes it all about himself, subtly manipulating them to affirm him. He becomes moody and petulant when he does not get affirmation. If anyone reflects his impact back to him, he appears to be oblivious and hurt.

These ministry leaders desire to live wholeheartedly for Christ. Still, they are ruled and sabotaged by functional idols that manifest as unconscious ultimate commitments that are contrary to Christ's lordship.

What are you most passionate about? How large is the disparity between what you *claim* to be most passionate about and what you are most passionate about *in practice*? We can claim to be committed to the gospel and at the same time have an ultimate commitment to getting relief from loneliness and seeking respite by engaging in sinful, destructive behaviors. We may claim to be committed to serving others and building a church that serves the community and at the same time have an ultimate commitment to impressing others or gaining affirmation. We may claim to be committed to working toward biblically defined social justice but at the same time have an ultimate commitment to maintaining power or control—of our ministries and others. The degree to which we are unconscious of our ultimate commitments is the degree to which they can control us and undermine our ministries. The premise of this book is that our spiritual health is measured

by the object of our love which, in turn, is revealed by our *ruling passions*.

Ruling simply means controlling or governing. *Passion* is a powerful or compelling emotion or purpose, a strong affection for an object, person, or thing; it is something that we enthusiastically and intentionally pursue with great energy. As image bearers, we are driven by a strong purpose to pursue an end goal. A ruling passion is an extraordinarily strong desire that rules or controls us such that our energy is given over to pursuing and achieving this goal.

Sometimes, it is easy to identify our ruling passions. Desire to advance in our career, succeed in education, perform well in sports, and have a good marriage are obvious and clear passions. Desires for competence, affirmation, acceptance, control, and avoiding pain can be less obvious, subtler goals that can also rule our hearts. And it is quite possible to be completely oblivious to our goals because we can be unconscious and ignorant of the subtle motivations of our heart—those drivers that truly motivate us—at least until we hurt someone, or some unforeseen consequence of our ruling passion ricochets and smacks us in the face. Let me prove this by turning to a rich passage of Scripture that has some profound and surprising implications for us as we examine how the apostle Peter’s ruling passion nearly sabotaged his ministry.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Henry Scougal said, “The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.”² Do you agree with the premise that our spiritual health can be measured by what we are most passionate about? Why or why not?
2. How is this different from your standard for measuring spiritual health?

3. As you reflect on your life and ministry, what are some of the superficial standards you have used to gauge your spiritual health and the spiritual health of others?
4. If you have used superficial standards of measuring spiritual health, how may using such standards impede your spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of others?
5. Have you seen a disparity in your own life and ministry between what you *claim* you are most passionate about and what you are most passionate about *in practice*? Identify specific areas of this disparity.