

Faithful Leaders focuses on two of the most neglected yet most crucial dimensions of leadership: character and godliness. In the plethora of ‘how to’ books, this book offers a compass—or a lifeline—to active Christians struggling with discouragement and defeat.”

**J.D. GREER, President, the Southern Baptist Convention;
Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina**

“There is a crisis of confidence in leadership in our culture because so many in authority have failed to act with integrity and honesty. Tragically this has been replicated in the church as once-respected leaders have too often been revealed to be false teachers, hypocrites, abusers or self-servers. This book is a timely warning and encouragement to pastors and other church leaders to guard their hearts against sin so that they serve Christ and his people faithfully. Rico writes with clarity, honesty and personal vulnerability as he opens and applies the Scriptures. This powerful word is just what we need to hear.”

JOHN STEVENS, National Director, FIEC

“This book is timely, realistic, honest, searching and relentlessly biblical. Above all, I found it searingly challenging in a way which moved me to take action in my own life. We don’t just need to read *Faithful Leaders* but to live it.”

**GARY MILLAR, Principal, Queensland Training College,
Australia; Author, *Need to Know***

“I suspect many of us, not just church leaders, spend too much time chasing after success in the eyes of the world (whatever that might be) instead of pursuing faithfulness in the eyes of the Lord. This book is a helpful and much needed corrective.”

**CARRIE SANDOM, Director of Women’s Ministry,
The Proclamation Trust**

“Rico Tice has provided ministry leaders with a gem here. There are many books on leadership today, but many ignore or give little consideration to the overwhelming emphases in Scripture, and Tice helps us prioritize these biblical values. I will be using it in classes and training programs in the days ahead.”

TONY MERIDA, Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Imago Dei Church, Raleigh, North Carolina; Director of Theological Training for Acts 29

“*Faithful Leaders* is a joy to read. Full of wisdom and focused on themes that leadership books ought to be about (but often aren’t), it is somehow both challenging and encouraging at the same time. Reading it made me reflect, and write notes in my Bible, and pray. Wonderfully done.”

ANDREW WILSON, Teaching Pastor, King’s Church London

“I could easily have assumed that this was written for those younger in church leadership—but then I discovered it was written for me in my third decade in ministry. Time, tiredness and the sheer toughness of pastoral ministry take their toll, and it is so easy to drift into self-pity, self-indulgence and self-deception. Read this book honestly, and you will be humbled and, yes, frightened. I was. But you will be helped, and your ministry will perhaps be saved from eternal regret, for eternal reward.”

WILLIAM J.U. PHILIP, Senior Minister, The Tron Church, Glasgow

“As go the shepherds, so go the sheep. Consequently, it’s vital for ministry leaders to understand not just where to lead God’s people but also how to lead God’s people. The message of this book is one that every Christian leader needs to be reminded of over and again. Whether you are a young or an older leader, a new or experienced leader, pick up this book to remind yourself that it’s not what people say about you and your ministry that matters. Ultimately, we seek the approval of our Lord.”

JUAN R. SANCHEZ, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; Author, *7 Dangers Facing Your Church*

“In *Faithful Leaders* Rico Tice raises his voice to urge us to refocus our ambitions on what matters most. He does so with his characteristic passion for Christ and sobering directness. But he also writes as a humble fellow pilgrim, not as one who has arrived without a struggle. The author comes on his knees to serve us and to urge us to ‘strive ... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord’ (Hebrews 12 v 14). That is a posture worth imitating and a lead worth following.”

**SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON, Author, *Devoted to God*;
Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, RTS**

“This honest, humble and gentle book points us to follow in the footsteps of Christ and is a must-read, whether you’ve been in leadership for five minutes or fifty years. Rico offers a timely and timeless encouragement. With persuasive prose, engaging storytelling and practical and helpful advice and questions, he succinctly urges us to work hard at the things that matter: character, repentance, humility, gentleness and dependence on the Holy Spirit.”

ELLIDH COOK, Student Worker, All Souls Langham Place, London

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FAITHFUL LEADERS

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AND THE THINGS THAT
MATTER MOST

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RICO TICE

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Foreword

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My best games of golf have all occurred when I am sound asleep. In dreamland I am capable of imaginary triumphs that bear no resemblance to my actual ability. The same is true, I fear, when it comes to assessing one's capacity for leadership. That is why the privilege of writing this foreword is tempered by being forced to face up to the challenge this book provides. I have been in pastoral ministry for 46 years, and the more the years pass, the more I understand that Christian leadership does not come naturally and never becomes easy.

When I think of leadership in general, I am put in mind of a fellow Scot. In October 2012, one of the Aldrich lecture halls at Harvard Business School was jam-packed; there was standing room only. No one was more surprised by the attendance than the visiting lecturer, Sir Alex Ferguson, who was speaking on the lessons in leadership he had learned in 26 years as manager of Manchester United.

One thing he emphasized has stuck with me since

I read his lecture: the care he took in choosing the captain of the team. Without a captain, a team loses direction and discipline just as an orchestra without a conductor forfeits coordination and harmony. In this, Sir Alex was not saying anything that the apostle Paul had not said 2,000 years before. Paul was equally clear that a leader of God's people must be possessed of a desire to lead, must command the respect of the team, must be clear about the "game plan" and must be capable of adapting to changing circumstances. Such a position of leadership—whether it be, as Rico says, around your dining table or from a pulpit—is no small thing, for it is to do God's work among God's people. But it is a great thing: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3 v 1, ESV). Yet part of having a legitimate desire to lead is an almost inevitable emotional recoil—as sense of "Who is sufficient for these things?" Here is where, unlike leadership in some other spheres, Christian leadership demands humility. And it is in this happy tension between aspiration and an acknowledgment of personal inadequacy that faithful leadership is exercised.

So many of our problems in church life can be traced to defective leadership. Churches have too often been damaged by leaders who are exceptionally nice but afraid of their own shadow, and by those who are exceptionally driven but make others afraid of them. Those who have led God's people effectively are found in neither category. In writing to both Titus and Timothy, Paul

urged them to make sure that they put the right leaders in place, and the way we lead matters no less today—because the church does not progress beyond the spiritual progress of its leaders.

It is essential that we get this right—and it is because Rico has his finger on the pulse that he is able to provide us with this wonderfully helpful guide to leadership. In print, as in person, he combines the forcefulness of a man who played rugby to a high level with a fetching sense of humility. He is aware that he has not written the “last word” on leadership, and he has certainly not written an easy word. But for those of us who long to lead effectively and faithfully, and who find that hard (and if we are honest, that is all of us), it is a necessary word.

One challenge contained in these pages is the way that Rico shows that effective leadership is not all about giftedness and ability. Fundamentally, he says, it is about holiness. In this, he is following the wisdom of men such as Robert Murray M’Cheyne and Charles Simeon. M’Cheyne, when he died at 29, left a legacy far greater than his age might suggest. In addressing the life of the minister/leader, he said, “My people’s greatest need is my personal holiness”. Simeon, a nineteenth-century minister in Cambridge, England, said that he heeded always the warning he was given by an older man:

“Watch continually over your own spirit, and do all in love; we must grow downwards in humility to soar heavenward. I should recommend your

having a watchful eye over yourself, for generally speaking as is the minister so are the people.”

In other words, the key to the leader’s public usefulness is his inner, unseen life. Character is what we are when no one is looking. The leader is leading all the time and, for the most part, unconsciously. Your holiness matters greatly to those you have been entrusted to lead.

If the need for holiness is one challenge I shall take from this book, the call to be faithful is another. I am so glad that Rico chose the adjective “faithful” to pair with the word “leadership”. It is fairly common for people to ask how they might pray for me in my ministry, and as far back as I can remember my answer has been the same: for faithfulness. Sometimes the response is to ask, “Faithfulness in what way?” to which I tend to reply, “In every way!” Faithfulness to my wife, my church family, to God’s call, to God’s word, to the gospel... the *faithful* leader, as Rico so brilliantly describes in these pages, is the leader God is looking for, and the leader who God will work through.

So you hold in your hands a book that will do you great good—whether you are a pastor, a children’s teacher, a Bible-study leader, a seminary student... For the church needs you to lead faithfully, and this book will not only show you how to do so but inspire you to do so. I often hear it observed that the future of the church seems uncertain today because so many great leaders are entering into their reward. But as J.C. Ryle put it in his day:

“Fear not for the church when ministers die, and saints are taken away. Christ can ever maintain his own cause. He will raise up better servants and brighter stars. The stars are all in his right hand. Leave off all anxious thought about the future. All is going well, though our eyes may not see it. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.”

I trust this short book will be part of the means by which God raises up leaders for this time who will be faithful to their call to love and serve God’s church, for the furtherance of his kingdom and to the glory of his Son.

*Alistair Begg
January 2021*

Introduction



One of the strange realities of being a pastor is that you spend more time at funerals than anyone else (apart from undertakers). Some are particularly joy-filled—celebrating a long life well-lived and now enjoyed into eternity. Some are particularly tear-stained—remembering a child, or a tragic self-inflicted death. Some are simply particularly memorable. So I’ll never forget the funeral at which an old lady said to me, “Rico, do you know what failure is?” “No—tell me,” I answered. What she said next has stuck with me ever since:

“Failure is being successful at the things that don’t matter.”

My best friend from university died in his thirties: he dropped dead of a pulmonary embolism. That was another memorable funeral, for all the wrong reasons. I remember standing at his graveside with his father, and his dad saying to me, “Rico, what do I write on my boy’s grave? What epitaph do I put on there?”

The sobering truth is that one day, someone will have

to decide what epitaph to write on your gravestone too. I've been to a lot of funerals—one day people will gather at mine. Will they say I've been a success? What even is success? We all want it—no one wants to be known as and then remembered as a failure or a fool—but for Christian believers in a position of influence (whether that's around the family table at home or preaching from the pulpit in a church) what does success look like? What would failure be?

Here's what: the metric of success and failure is not what your relatives write on your gravestone but what God says to you that day you die. For to some he will say, "You fool," just as he did to the man in Jesus' parable who had lived as though his own self-advancement and self-gratification mattered most (Luke 12 v 20). And I don't think being a church member or a pastor insulates us from hearing that verdict. The fire of God's judgment will "test the quality of each person's work" in ministry (1 Corinthians 3 v 13). And...

*"If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss
but yet will be saved—even though only as one
escaping through the flames." (v 15)*

There is a category of saved fool—of those who are saved by grace but whose lives were not well spent.

And yet to others our Lord will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," just as was said to the men in Jesus' parable who used all that their master had given them to the uttermost, for his glory and their eternal joy (Matthew 25 v 21).

Of course, “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2 v 8-9). I make sure I remind myself regularly of the three tenses of salvation that I learned when I was a young Christian. By grace I have been saved from the penalty of sin. By grace I am being saved from the power of sin. By grace I will one day be saved from the presence of sin.

But as trophies of grace, you and I are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2 v 10). My salvation is based only and always on Christ’s finished work for me, but whether or not I hear “Well done” when I meet him is based on Christ’s work through me—on my ministry in his service.

So just imagine hearing those words—that affirmation of your work from divine lips: “Well done”. And just imagine hearing those words—that rebuke of your life from divine lips: “You fool”. If God welcomes you into his presence on the cusp of eternity and fixes you in the eye and says, “You fool”, all the achievements and accolades and accumulations of this life will not matter one jot. Failure is being successful at the things that don’t matter. And if God welcomes you into his presence on the cusp of eternity and smiles at you and says, “Well done, good and faithful servant”, then all the sacrifices and service and striving will have been infinitely, eternally worth it.

Hearing your Creator and your Father say, “Well

done”—that’s all that ultimately matters, isn’t it? That’s the measure of a life worth living, whatever they say of me in a eulogy and whatever they write about me on my headstone.

This book is about what it takes to live that kind of life: what it looks like to hear “Well done” instead of “You fool”. It is a book for anyone in any kind of church leadership. (I’ll use the word “pastor” a lot—just substitute “elder”, “youth worker”, “Bible-study leader” or whatever applies to your own life.) It is by no means the last word on, or the only book you’ll need about, Christian leadership. Nor is it (I hope) an easy read—I hope it will jolt you or change you. I’m not writing as someone who has all this sorted, but as a fellow struggler—from the trenches, as it were, rather than from the mountaintop. These are all things that I need to hear on repeat—and that you do too. Why? Because to a large extent, the spiritual health of a church leader determines the spiritual health of his congregation. That means that our success, our faithfulness, our progress and our leadership matter—and matter eternally.

I want to be a faithful leader. I want to hear my Father look me in the eye and, surveying my ministry, say, “Well done”. I want you to hear it too. That means we need to define success, to fight our sin, to lead ourselves, and to serve our churches. Which sounds simple when I put it in a sentence; but, if you’re like me, it’s going to be the battle of our life.

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