

These Small Stumbles Can Lead to a Huge Moral Fall

It's not just celebrities who fall from leadership.

There are too many who quietly step down from leadership because, in some way, they have disqualified themselves. They just don't make the headlines.

My hope is always for restoration, but the greater need is to help leaders prevent a fall in the first place.

As the body of Christ, it's important that our disposition toward fallen leaders is *not* judgment, but compassion resulting in prayer. This does not suggest lowered standards; it speaks to grace and hope for restoration.

So what can we do? What practices can leaders themselves put in place to stay proactive and help prevent a fall?

The best first step is to identify and watch for the "smaller" stumbles that lead to a big fall.

That's a common deception of the devil. He loves to make things *look* small and harmless, like no big deal. "What's a tiny little slip in integrity when, after all, you are doing good ministry for the people, right? ..." Wrong!

Much like the story in Genesis chapter 3:2-5. Adam and Eve knew they were not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. But the enemy deceived them: "Then the serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5).

"You surely will not die." Those words have been whispered millions of times. "Go ahead, take a bite. Just a little bite. It tastes incredible, and it won't hurt you!"

What are those little bites, those seemingly small stumbles that can lead to a big fall?

How can we remain aware, proactive and prevent a fall?

7 ‘Small’ Stumbles That Can Lead to a Big Fall

1. Believing it can’t happen to you.

I’ve been in ministry for over 35 years and made plenty of mistakes. Only by God’s grace do I continue. However, the most foolish thing I could ever think or say is something like: “Well, at this point, it could never happen to me.” It would be at that moment that I become most vulnerable to a fall.

That’s true for any leader regardless of age or experience. You may be disciplined, smart and full of integrity, but you’re not invincible. We all have some form of leadership kryptonite; what’s yours?

Start here; acknowledge it could happen to you. Don’t panic or get stuck on that thought, but be aware and remain dependent upon God and His guidance for your life.

2. Cultivating a sense of entitlement.

There is something in the shadow side of leadership that can allow a sense of entitlement to creep in. It’s a slow process but a scary one.

It’s rarely intentional and usually emerges from a leader who is working hard and serving the people well. But something happens. It starts small, and sounds like, “I *deserve* this.” What is imagined as deserved can be anything from special privileges to perhaps financial rewards.

As leaders, we should never live above the rules made for everyone else. Once the “I deserve” monster is let loose, even for small things, there is no end to it, because it’s never enough.

3. Justifying unhealthy relief valves.

Pressure in leadership is real, and it can get to anyone. Why? We all have limits.

We were not designed to work without rest and refueling. Soul level restoration is essential.

There are healthy and unhealthy ways to restore your soul. The healthy options include much of the obvious from prayer to a fun hobby and meaningful friendships to enjoy life with. Even a good old-fashioned short nap can help!

But let's look at the unhealthy side. From obsessions and addictions to flat-out sin, be careful about what may be brewing underneath.

An unhealthy source of relief usually starts small. It's subtle. For example, it could be a growing desire for online gaming or shopping. It started as something fun on occasion, and now it's approaching obsession or even addiction.

What are your "relief valves" that help you reduce the pressure? What are the healthy ways you restore your soul?

4. Entertaining a private thought life that is inconsistent with your public life.

No one is entirely free of fleeting thoughts and temptations that are not pleasing to God. However, there is a significant difference between a momentary thought and nurturing that thought until it grows to the point of action.

These small beginnings in your thought life can lead to behavior, even another life, that is different than the life you want or the life others believe about you.

It's a big leap, I know, but it happens.

First, if this is already happening, don't let Satan beat you

up. God's grace is sufficient. But take action. Talk to someone this week. Talk with a trusted, smart and strong leader who can help you overcome whatever struggle you face.

5. Pushing the limits of your physical health.

This may seem like the most innocent on the list, and perhaps it is, but it's still dangerous. Why? Smart leaders do dumb things when they are overly tired and physically run down.

Trust me on this one; I know. We all have seasons where we push hard, and that's doable for a short while. In fact, it's sometimes necessary. It is not, however, sustainable.

There's nothing heroic or sacrificial about running yourself into the ground so that you can't lead, love and care for people.

Candidly, then people have to care for you. Needing care is not the problem; it's when it was completely unnecessary and resulting only from you not taking care of yourself. Then, those who need your leadership must wait.

You know what to do ... right? Eat smart and exercise. Take a day off—and so on. So, I'm not going to preach. But I hope this serves as a kind prompt for you if needed.

6. Ignoring the accountability of authentic community.

Isolation breaks community and takes leaders out.

Isolation may also be considered innocent. It sounds like this: "I'm not hurting anyone, I'm super busy, and I need alone time."

We were never intended to lead alone. The body of Christ was designed to function in community. We were created to be open, honest and even vulnerable with each other.

Self-protection, hiding and pretending when in public lead to

unhealthy patterns and eventually a self-destructive lifestyle.

Another big leap? Perhaps. Except it happens too often. Like some of the other points on this list, it starts slow, subtle and seems really small.

Who's in your inner circle? Who knows everything about you? Who cares about you and speaks truth to you? Don't miss out on what God has for you in community.

7. Shortchanging your time with God.

You'd think that those of us who are church leaders would be the last to stumble when it comes to a personal relationship with God.

The truth is, however, we are among the most vulnerable because our faith is so closely connected to our work. For a church leader, what was once very personal can become merely professional, and it's easy to justify that what we do covers who we are.

But nothing can replace the personal nature of focused time with God to nurture your relationship with Him.

The basics of worship, prayer and the study of God's Word are essential to your long-term walk with God and in turn, your effectiveness as a leader.

It's not about a legalistic approach or a certain number of minutes each day. It's not about if you journal or not. It's a personal and extraordinary relationship to cultivate, deepen and enjoy. It's not something you can rush, and it gets deeper as the years go by. {eoa}

Dan Reiland is the executive pastor at 12Stone Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia. He previously partnered with John Maxwell for 20 years, first as executive pastor at Skyline Wesleyan Church in San Diego, then as vice president of

leadership and church development at INJOY.

This article originally appeared at .