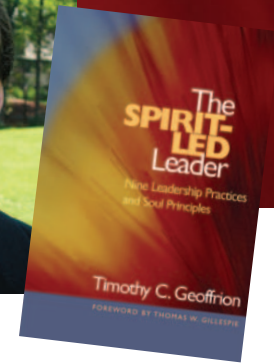




outStanding in the field



The Spirit-Led Leader

by Heather Roote Faller

We hear it often: membership in mainline churches is declining, resources dwindling. Pastors must do more with less. And many pastors are coming up short.

For many, the lack of resources becomes consuming, and leaders may disconnect from their sense of vocation. They don't know how they'll go on. But even more importantly, they don't know why they should go on. They don't know what endless rounds of committee meetings, disgruntled or ineffective staff, apathetic members, and programs that won't take off have to do with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Tim Geoffrion (M.Div. '83) knows this landscape. He spent the last ten years as executive director of Family Hope Services in Plymouth, Minnesota, and before that he served as a pastor of churches in Minnesota and Illinois. With a Ph.D. in New Testament from Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, he has also served as a college and seminary professor. Geoffrion's book, *The Spirit-Led Leader*, is written for pastors, administrators, and managers who want to integrate their leadership with their spiritual lives. The book intends to create leaders who aren't problem-oriented, or ego-driven, but rather, Spirit-led.

Geoffrion doesn't speak from the mountaintop. "I'm down here in the trenches," he says. In his own search for answers, he explains, "I tried working harder, being nicer, being less nice, reading books, attending more seminars, hiring better qualified people, firing people who were wrong for the job, being more assertive, being less assertive, and even praying more." Sound familiar?

Geoffrion says his book "doesn't offer a formula, but rather a way of going about seeking God." The book is not a theology of leadership; it addresses a spiritual problem, and it offers a spiritual solution. "These aren't practices that only work on spiritual retreat," he says. Rather, "these are ways of being with staff members where the rubber meets the road." Some of the suggestions are simple and direct, but a drowning leader needs to be reminded to paddle and kick. Geoffrion proposes nine soul principles, the paddle, and nine spiritual practices, the kick. "Soul principles ground our thinking in biblical truth, and leadership practices allow us to govern and structure our leadership to be in line with our principles," Geoffrion says.

What he calls the soul principles help leaders stay focused. Today's pastors are accomplished professionals, with academic degrees and achievements in the church and the academy. And with so many accomplishments, it's hard not to rely on those for success. But ultimately, Geoffrion says, "being an effective spiritual leader requires a personal relationship with God." This is the soul principle that Geoffrion calls the heart of spiritual leadership: grace is the only sure foundation for spiritual leadership. For Geoffrion, "Grace is more than forgiveness. It's also empowering, creating something in us that we can't create ourselves. That's the transformation we need."

And how do leaders effect that transformation? The soul principle has to be connected to the practice of leadership. "That's what a Spirit-led leader is: one whose leadership is integrated with his or her spirituality," Geoffrion says. The practice that goes with this principle of grace as the foundation for ministry is to open fully to the love of God. To do this, Geoffrion says, leaders must develop habits that reinforce the soul principle, such as prayer, journaling, and Scripture study. Geoffrion provides exercises in trusting God, including simply cultivating an awareness of God's presence and love.

In a chapter of the book titled "Listening Well," Geoffrion's principle is that the Holy Spirit speaks through every team member, and the practice is leading by listening. He argues that the spiritual leader needs not only to listen to God's Spirit, but also to the people being led. His Spirit-led leader isn't only interested in results, but also in the people who give the results, and for whom the results ultimately matter. The model of leadership the culture offers isn't helpful for spiritual leaders, Geoffrion believes, whether it be "The Donald" hiring and firing in a mahogany boardroom, or the military model of decisiveness that works well under fire but not so well when the goal is to bring about consensus and spiritual growth for all concerned. "The Spirit-led leader is a catalyst for creating a body dynamic," says Geoffrion. "The pastor rarely can serve as a pastor to individual staff members, but rather has a vital role as spiritual leader of the organization as a whole."

The discouragement, burnout, and compassion-fatigue that leaders feel are very real. They destroy ministries not because pastors can't recognize them, understand them, or explain them. They destroy ministries because they gradually erode the spirit. Geoffrion's principles and practices intend to fortify the human spirit by reconnecting it to the empowering grace of the Holy Spirit. The book leads the church to what Geoffrion thinks it needs most: Spirit-led leaders. ■

Tim Geoffrion has a spiritual coaching and teaching ministry to pastors, leaders, and other people of influence. He lives with his wife and two sons in Deephaven, Minnesota. For more information or to order the book, go to www.spirit-ledleader.com, or email the author at timgeoffrion@aol.com.