



CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP FOUNDATIONS

Passion Four:
Crop

from grace to sway

THE SEVEN PASSIONS OF BIBLICAL LEADERS

study 1

Introduction to CROP for Christian influencers

Now we move from the Operating System of Christian influence (the biblical passions that lie at the heart of Christian influence) to the first of the Apps. **The Apps are the biblical passions that are key in growing your influence God's way.**

When I graduated from university, I taught maths and science for a few years in a tiny country town. It was a broadening experience. I learned to ride horses and motorbikes (with varying degrees of success), to dance at old time dances (an experience I had missed in my conservative upbringing), and to talk a lot about cattle and crops. The farmers in the district were an experienced, hard-working bunch who were pleased to bend the ear of a young teacher. I learned all sorts of details about crops, much of which I have long forgotten. But while the soil around town was probably better suited to grazing than farming, these skilful, industrious farmers still managed to produce some significant crops when the rains came.

That's what this module is about: producing results; generating a good CROP. Surprisingly, CROP was the last of the biblical passions I added. For quite some time, I taught six biblical passions for Christian influence. But I gradually became convinced that the Bible does insist that results are important. These can be seen in the form of fruit or what I have called CROP. It was probably the Parable of the Talents that had most impact on me. I was persuaded that while Christians could revel in God's GRACE, strongly LOVE others, and have a deep HEART for God and his word, if they didn't actually make a tangible difference in anyone's life, then they were not really Christians of influence. Some sort of CROP is essential. I realised that CROP had to be one of the core biblical passions of leadership. We're looking for results.

You see the Bible makes it clear that Christians are stewards of God's resources. God has given us resources that we are to utilise well on his behalf. Some of these resources include our time and energy, our friends and support, our physical resources, our financial resources, and our gifts

**Christians are stewards of
God's resources.**

and abilities. None of these resources has been earned by us. They don't belong to us. As God's stewards, we are called to manage them wisely and effectively so that they produce a good CROP as the return on God's investment in us.

But is it really our responsibility to produce a CROP or just to be faithful to God? What is our obligation and what is God's? If there is a parallel between spiritual and physical crops, does a good farmer have to produce a large crop or is that really more dependent on the soil and the rain? What does God expect from us as stewards? We need to start our biblical exploration engaging with these questions.

How important are results?

The issue of ministry results is a difficult one for Christians of influence. In a culture that emphasises the need for tangible success, some Christians respond by saying that we are only called to be faithful to God's call and will, not necessarily to be successful.

Jeremiah was faithful to God's call and therefore was regarded biblically as a respected spiritual leader despite few apparent results.

At the end of last century, the church growth movement emphasised the need for church leaders to produce quantifiable results. This was probably a reaction to the lack of vision and accountability of earlier church leaders, but it produced an unhealthy focus on increasing attendance and finances that consequently influenced the motives of many church leaders. This was damaging. Ultimately, as we have seen in the Operating System passions,

biblical influence requires faithfulness to God more than measurable success.

Jeremiah is an example of a faithful leader who produced few apparent results. His call was to "stand against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land" (Jer. 1:18). Well he did what God asked him to do very well, but no-one seemed to listen, so there was little observable success from his life ministry. But he was faithful to God's call and therefore was regarded biblically as a respected spiritual leader.

Like farmers, who while they work hard and smart, cannot guarantee the success of their crop, Christians of influence cannot guarantee the success of their ministry. There are many uncontrollable issues that may determine how significant our tangible ministry results are. Here are some of them:

1. Calling. As we saw with Jeremiah above, some Christians have more challenging callings (at least in terms of results) than others. For example, an evangelist in a megachurch may well see more conversions than a cross-cultural missionary to Muslims. Their tangible success has nothing to do with their giftings, abilities or hard work. It's related to their callings.

2. Gifting/ability. Some Christians are more gifted and talented. In the parable of the talents,

It's not our responsibility to produce the CROP, but we have a significant contribution to make. We have to learn and grow as good farmers so that we do our very best.

Jesus described a master who allocated talents to servants on the basis of their ability. He said. **“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability”** (Matt. 25:14-15).

Some people have been given more ability than others and therefore are likely to see greater results.

3. Opportunities/environment. I have seen leaders experience great success in one context and yet see few results when they move to a different context. Some people just seem to be in the right place at the right time and see God do great things. For others, leadership is tough and difficult, and the overt results are paltry. Different environments will produce different results.

4. Support. The amount of support that you get can make a significant difference to the results of your influence. For example, Timothy had a huge amount of support from Paul as he grew as a leader, and therefore he probably achieved more than others who had no networks, mentors or sponsors.

5. Followers. Poor old Moses had a hopeless group of people to lead. For 40 years they whinged and whined, until they died out and God was able to raise up a more faith-filled generation. Moses didn't appear to achieve much in all those wilderness years. Then Joshua took over and almost immediately led them in the conquest of Canaan. I don't think that Joshua was a better leader; he just had better followers.

6. God's sovereign will. During my two years teaching in a little country town, God moved in great power in the school with teachers and many students becoming Christians. Eventually we started a small church in the town. In my next teaching appointment in a large regional centre, nothing much spiritually happened in the much larger school, despite my growing understanding of leadership and my prayer and more focused effort. God controls these things.

I realise that on occasions we can do something about the issues above. We can grow our giftings. We can raise up better followers. We can look for mentors. But in any ministry situation there will still be many factors beyond our control that impact our degree of influence. We must accept this. The results are not actually in our hands. If you can't grasp this, reread the module on GRACE.

More than faithfulness

Is it then a matter of being faithful and not looking for results? Do we just have to work on GRACE, LOVE and HEART and leave the outcomes up to God? Well yes and no. Ultimately, as we have seen, this is true. There are many factors outside our control. God is not looking for us to be successful. He just wants us to follow him and serve others.

But biblically that's not the whole story. God entrusts us with his resources and he is expecting us to manage them well and to earn a return from their use. We do have a part to play in the CROP of our influence.

In the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), Jesus describes in story form how God entrusts us, as stewards, with his resources:

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

The steward's role was to put these resources to good use with a view to earning a profit, as two of the servants in the story did:

“The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.”

Although the two effective stewards earned different amounts (according to their “ability” and consequent resources), they both received exactly the same commendation from their master (Matt. 25:21, 23):

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

Notice the emphasis on faithfulness, not the amount earned, in the master's praise. But this is a faithfulness that is tied to results. The master was looking for good stewardship – results in keeping with the resources that they had been given.

**Faithfulness needs to result
in good stewardship.**

The problem with the ineffective steward was not primarily his misunderstanding of the master's attitude, but his laziness and unwillingness to earn any profit. As the master says (Matt. 25:26-27):

“You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.”

So as stewards of God's resources, we are expected to be faithful. But true faithfulness will necessarily mean that we produce results proportional to the assets and opportunities we have been given. Faithfulness is foundational, but some form of success is expected.

However, if we make success our major measure of stewardship, it puts far too much emphasis on our contribution. As we have seen, there are many factors under the hand of God that are beyond our control. Making faithfulness our measure of stewardship is certainly closer to the heart of biblical revelation. But it needs to be faithfulness that includes some expectation of results, of CROP. Faithfulness needs to result in good stewardship and its resultant CROP.

You see some Christians of influence would describe themselves as faithful to God (right HEART), but they are not actually bearing enough CROP. They may not be using their gifts well or working hard enough or making good decisions or praying consistently, and therefore not producing a sufficient CROP from God's perspective.

The Bible has a strong emphasis on bearing fruit (or CROP as we are calling it). Jesus said, **“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit [a great CROP], showing yourselves to be my disciples”** (John 15:8). As we saw in the previous module, often the word “fruit” is applied to the godly character that is produced by the Holy Spirit in our lives e.g. the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). But the term is also used for the conversion of non-Christians (Rom. 1:13) and acts of mercy (Rom. 15:28). Fruit is the result of God's work in us and God's work through us.

God is looking for a CROP from the work of his stewards. It's not our responsibility to produce the CROP, but we have a significant contribution to make. We have to learn and grow as good farmers (1 Cor. 3:9) so that we do our very best. **We need to be skilful gardeners for God to produce a great CROP through us** (John 15:5).

Sure, God has given us different callings and capacities. We are not all expected to bear the same size or quality of CROP. We are not all expected to have the same degree of influence. But our job is to maximise the CROP God produces through us.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 4.1

1. Summarise briefly what today's reading has said about CROP.
2. Can you see any signs of God producing some CROP through your influence?

study 2

Producing a CROP (Part 1)

What can we do personally to produce a great CROP? What does the Bible say? I will explore three components of our contribution to CROP:

- 1. Going deeper: relying more on God**
- 2. Getting stronger: pressing on with determination**
- 3. Doing better: becoming more effective**

Going Deeper: relying more on God

If the CROP ultimately comes from God, then the more we stay close to him and rely on him (“remain in him”), the greater the CROP will be. That’s what Jesus says in John 15:1-17. Here is an excerpt:

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:4-8)

In the HEART module, we looked at the impact that living close to God has on our character and our wisdom, so I don’t need to repeat that. Here I will look at how our dependence on God is linked with the fruit we produce (CROP). Remaining in Christ involves:

1. Praying continually about our ministry. In John 15, there is a strong connection between remaining in Christ and prayer. Jesus says, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). As we stay close to Jesus and talk with him about all we are doing, we hear his voice, follow his will, and consequently see God work in greater power.

2. Knowing and trusting God's word. As we study and really believe God's word, God's words fill us. As Jesus describes it, "my words remain in you" (John 15:7). The more our life and ministry revolve around God's truth, the greater the CROP that will flow from him.

3. Obeying God. It's not just a matter of knowing God's truth, but living it out in obedience. In speaking about remaining in him, Jesus puts a strong emphasis on obedience. He says, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:10). The more we do what God asks, the more we remain in him and his love and the greater the CROP.

4. Allowing God's pruning. The above three principles are fairly predictable, but the idea of pruning seems to have little obvious relationship to remaining in Christ. But Jesus makes it clear that pruning is involved in depending on him and therefore producing a CROP. He says, "**He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful**" (John 15:2). Depending on God is not going to be smooth sailing with all our prayers answered quickly and continual growth in our influence. There will be periods of God taking away our blessing and fruit in order to shape us and prepare for future growth. This makes us more dependent on him and is a necessary part of the eventual production of a great CROP.

So part of our role in producing a good CROP is going deeper with God. This involves staying close to God and really depending on him as we pray continually, trust his truth, live his way, and allow him to shape us using his methods, including pruning.

**As leaders in God's army,
we have a prominent role
to place. It will be costly.**

Getting Stronger: pressing on with determination

Effective biblical leaders were not just people who relied on God to produce a CROP, they also had great determination and were willing to make huge sacrifices to influence others. They were women and men of courage, strength and perseverance.

At the end of his ministry, Paul reflects on his life and leadership in the final part of a letter to his protégé Timothy. Here's how he describes his contribution to the wonderful CROP that God has produced through his influence:

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
(2 Tim. 4:6-7)

In this statement, Paul mentions three actions of personal strength that are vital to generating a good CROP.

1. Fight a good fight. There is a huge battle going on in this world between God and the forces

of evil. As leaders in God's army, we have a prominent role to play in this fight. It will be costly, demanding, challenging and, at times, frightening. We will get attacked and probably injured. We can never afford to sit back and take it easy because we will become easy prey for the enemy. We stay alert and ready to serve and fight. I know it sounds like I'm over-dramatising things. There are many other aspects to living for God that will produce peace and joy. But the Bible persistently uses the image of a battle for Christian service. Those who influence for Jesus are going to have to fight like him. This means deprivation and suffering and effort. As Peter says,

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin” (1 Pet. 4:1). Fighting a good fight will contribute to a good CROP.

2. Finish the race. Paul's picture changes to that of an athletic contest. There is no emphasis on winning the race here, but on staying the course until the very end and completing the event. Serving Jesus is not a sprint but a marathon. It's a life-long calling. Many influencers run hard for a short time, but grow tired or disillusioned and give up or pull back. The greatest CROP comes from those who will not give up or give in, but who faithfully continue to follow God and serve others to the end of the race. This requires patience and perseverance. It involves holding on to God, getting up after you fall, serving when it's tough, and pushing yourself to ensure that you don't give up. As Paul said earlier to the Corinthians, **“I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”** (1 Cor. 9:27).

Christian influence is a marathon that requires perseverance.

3. Keep the faith. It is likely here that Paul is referring to his huge responsibility in guarding the gospel (that had been revealed to him by Jesus) from all the attacks by those who would pervert it. He had done a good job in making sure that the gospel of Jesus had remained at the heart of the church. While we probably don't have Paul's central role in keeping the faith, it still remains paramount that Christians of influence operate from a gospel base. We studied this in detail in the GRACE chapter. If we are to produce a good CROP, we need to be driven by the gospel (Jesus lived, died and rose again so that the world can have a relationship with God who loves them deeply). It's all about God, not about us.

I can sum up these three actions that Paul describes in the word, “stronger.” If you want God to produce a great CROP through you, you need to be stronger in the fight, stronger in staying the marathon, and stronger in your commitment to the gospel. Influence is not a call for the faint-hearted. It requires backbone and dedication. It calls for a huge effort and a determination to keep going no matter what the circumstances or cost.

You find such an attitude exuding from all Paul's writings. Listen to this:

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14).

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 4.2

1. Summarise briefly what today's reading has said about CROP.
2. Is "going deeper" or "getting stronger" your greatest challenge at the moment?

study 3

Producing a CROP (Part 2)

In Study 2, we looked at two ways that we can contribute to growing our CROP:

1. Going Deeper: relying more on God

2. Getting Stronger: pressing on with determination

Here is the third way. This is a long reading today. Sorry.

Doing Better: becoming more effective at what God calls us to do

The letters in the New Testament have two broad aims. The first is to teach truth, that is, to clarify theology. The second is to help Christians grow in their application of truth. That is, to live more obediently and effectively for God. In the letters addressed to individual Christian leaders (particularly Timothy and Titus), the application was targeted towards their growth as leaders so that they could influence better. Paul wanted to grow their CROP by helping them become more effective in the way they influenced.

It makes sense. To be good stewards of God's resources so that God can produce a strong CROP through our influence, we not only need to go deeper and be stronger, but also to become better at what we do.

There are many practical aspects in becoming a better influencer. It requires a lifetime of growth. In this section, I will just deal with a few of the more foundational issues that will help you get the most out of who God has made you and what God has called you to do.

a. Know and accept yourself

You can depend on God and be committed to continuing to serve him without knowing much about yourself. But it is very difficult to be more effective in ministry without beginning to understand how God has made you. You see we have all been created different because God intends for us to

bring a unique contribution to his kingdom. He has given each of us particular personalities and traits and styles, with all their strengths and challenges, through which he will achieve his purposes.

So doing better in following our unique calling requires us to understand how we have been made. The journey to self-understanding is both exciting and painful. We rejoice over our strengths and potential and we fret over our weaknesses and brokenness. If we only discover our strengths, we become proud and insensitive. If we only see our weaknesses, we become crippled and fragile.

There are many personality tests available that can help us pursue self-understanding. These are useful and revealing. But the best insights come from mentors and those who love us enough to be honest with us. It is so important to seek understanding of both our strengths and our flaws.

We need to seek understanding of both our strengths and flaws.

Of course, self-understanding is a lifetime journey, but it does not happen naturally over time. You need to actively pursue self-knowledge. There are plenty of people who have no idea how they come across or why people react to them the way they do. It's difficult for such people to make the most of the resources and opportunities that God gives them.

But note that we not only need to know ourselves but also to accept ourselves. Often, as we get to know ourselves better, we find that we are far more broken and flawed and stupid and difficult than we thought. What initially looked like impressive strengths are seen to also have significant deficits. As we discover a dark side to our personality and many gaps in our abilities, it's easy to become despondent.

King David was a very impressive person who had huge strengths and abilities. He was a visionary leader, a gifted musician, a powerful warrior, a great friend, a crack marksman with a slingshot, and he had God's heart. Yet he also exhibited significant limitations. At times he made poor decisions, he was captured by his selfish desires, he was too weak as a father, and he chose some poor associates. These limitations show his brokenness, but they also point to weaknesses in his personality.

Yet David could write: **"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well"** (Psalm 139:13-14). In this psalm, David is celebrating God's deep personal involvement in both his forming of him and in his whole life. David was designed specially by God, and so were you – with all your personality strengths and weaknesses. You need to celebrate the way God has made you with David.

If you feel that God could have done a better job with your personality and abilities, may I just remind you that God is not dependent on your great capacities to get his work done. He actually chooses to use those who are not as gifted or able or significant to show his greatness. Here is what Paul says:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you

were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (1 Cor. 1:26-27)

It's difficult to be better at influencing if you are constantly blind-sided by your lack of self-understanding, or held back by your lack of confidence in the way God has made you. Knowing and accepting yourself is a good place to start in the quest to "do better."

b. Go with your gifts

There is no doubt that God has specially gifted you to make a significant contribution to his work. In the following Scripture, Paul makes it clear that no-one has all the gifts, so everyone's gift is needed in the body of Christ:

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Cor. 12:27-30)

It's likely that you will do your best work for God and have the greatest influence in the area of your giftings and abilities. You will need to spend most of your time working with your strengths. This makes sense. If God has gifted you, then he wants you working with those gifts, not trying to do a whole lot of things that you have not been designed for. Recognising your gifts and abilities is very important if you are to be effective in producing a good CROP.

It is likely you will do your best work for God in the area you are most gifted.

There are many spiritual gift surveys around that may give you a start in discerning your gifts, but their usefulness is limited because they only highlight your own perceptions. Below is a process for finding your gifts that I think will help. However, you need to understand that it will take you much longer than the time it takes to fill out a questionnaire.

1. Be available to God and serve others. Try lots of different things. The best way to find out what your gifts are is to have a go at using them. Be willing to volunteer. Step out of your comfort zone. Short-term ministries like camps can be really helpful here because they allow you to have a go without being committed long-term to something you are not gifted at.

2. Note what you enjoy and how God uses you. I realise that we're in a spiritual battle and sometimes ministry will be really tough, but generally there will be some sense of satisfaction, maybe even excitement at times, when you are using a gift. There also should be some CROP, so watch for how God is using you. Check out what others recognise in you.

3. Try to put a name on your gift. Don't feel that you need to stick to the gifts mentioned in Scripture. Every biblical list of gifts is different so there is no official, all-encompassing list in the New Testament. Try to discern the gift not just the ministry. For example, you might be effective in youth group ministry. But is this mainly because you enjoy spending time encouraging the youth, or running the program well, or sharing the gospel with the non-Christians, or leading the team, or giving the devotion, or having a party? What is the main gift involved?

4. Pray about it and put more time into using this gift. This is where you start to get intentional. Focus energy on using this gift in a range of situations. See if it develops. If it does, you have your gift.

5. Look for a gift cluster. Most of us have a number of gifts, so don't just be satisfied with one, look for more. Repeat the process above. How else is God using you? Eventually, you may find a cluster of gifts. Then try to order your gifts so that you make sure that you are regularly using the main ones.

The most effective way to develop your gifts is to use them. Paul said to Timothy, **"I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands"** (2 Tim. 1:6). Timothy had a gift (no-one knows exactly what it was but I'm voting for pastoral leadership, although preaching could be another option), but it needed to be set alight by Timothy as he used it. Gifts are like muscles. They grow through exercise.

c. Work on your limiting weaknesses

If we should focus on the things we are gifted in, does that mean that we don't worry about our weaknesses? Well the answer is both yes and no. You certainly shouldn't make your weaknesses the main focus of your effort. If you do this, the chances are that you will waste a lot of your resources on small improvements that will make little difference. This is not the way to produce a CROP. **Invest in the areas of your gifts/strengths and let others who are differently gifted serve in your areas of weakness. This is the way the body of Christ does its best work.**

However, there are three exceptions to this principle. The first is when your weakness is not a personality/gifts weakness but a significant character weakness. As we saw in our discussion of HEART, character flaws will eventually undermine or even destroy your influence. Working on character weaknesses is a top priority.

Working on your limiting character weaknesses should be a top priority.

The second exception is when your weaknesses are significantly damaging your influence so that your gifts are not producing the CROP they should. For example, the gifted Bible study leader who is never prepared or the great visionary who struggles to communicate personally with people will struggle to produce a strong CROP. The Bible study leader will probably not become a time

management guru, neither will the visionary turn into a brilliant pastoral carer. To attempt that would direct good resources away from their strengths. But if their gifts are going to be fully utilised, the Bible study leader needs to be able to prepare a study on time and the visionary needs to be able to listen to and respond to people.

As you can see, there is a fine balance here. It would appear that Timothy was naturally timid. He probably never developed a hard-hitting, outgoing personality like Paul, nor should he have. God didn't make him like that. But his natural shyness was holding back his influence and so Paul advised him, **"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline"** (2 Tim. 1:7). He had to work on this weakness that was undermining his CROP.

The third exception to the "go with your strengths" maxim is when the area of weakness is part of your ministry. While your ministry should revolve around your strengths not your weaknesses, there will always be aspects of service that involve pushing yourself through significant challenges that don't come easily for you. For example, I'm naturally an introvert. This is not a character weakness, and most times it has been a help in a ministry that has required a lot of time reading, thinking, writing and planning. But my job also entails spending significant time with people. As I have shared already, I'd mostly prefer to be working alone in my office, but often I don't have the choice. I just have to expend lots of my energy on people. It's an essential part of my ministry and I need to do it well. And sometimes I even enjoy it.

Timid Timothy was quite young to be leader of the Ephesian church. He was reticent to put himself forward as an example because he had little life experience compared to many of the older leaders, and in his culture, seniority was deeply respected. But his calling required his leading the way and setting the example, so Paul advised him, **"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity"** (1 Tim 4:12). He may have felt uncomfortable about this, but he had no option. It was part of his ministry. We always have to do some things that are not our natural strengths or gifts. This keeps us humble and dependent on God.

So while we go with our strengths, we need to work on our limiting weaknesses.

d. Discern what God wants you to do

When you first start to influence, my suggestion above is to try to do as much as you can. Don't worry too much about your gifts or what ministries are most suitable for you, just give things a go and see what happens. At this early stage, your main goals are to learn about serving God and to learn about yourself.

But as your gifts and abilities begin to emerge, you must begin to ask the question, "Well what does God want me to do?" In other words, you need to discern how God wants you to use the resources that he has given you. When you have some idea of your gifts and the areas in your life that require growth, you need to work out how God wants you to influence, how he is calling you to produce

**The most effective way to develop your gifts is to use them.
Gifts are like muscles, they grow through exercise.**

a CROP. You can use your resources efficiently without having a direction, but you can't use them proficiently. To be proficient you need to be sure that you're investing in the right things.

When I say, "the right things," I'm not necessarily thinking about a specific ministry or a special role. It's more a conviction of the things that you need to be doing; the things God has gifted and prepared you for. For example, you might find that you have the gift of encouragement. You could use this gift in numerous ministries both within and without the church, but the essential thing is that you have time and space in whatever you do to be able to invest in and encourage people. This needs to be a focus for you.

Your direction from God is usually discerned through a combination of your emerging gifts, your passions, your values, your heart, your experiences, and God's specific leading. It may change as you learn more about God and more about yourself.

Here are some questions/activities that may help you in finding the mission God has for you:

- What has God said to you about his purpose for your life? How has God gifted you? What passions has God given you? How has God used you?
- What is important in your life? What brings you the most joy? When are you most satisfied? What would you choose to do if you had freedom and time?
- What do your mentors say you should be doing?
- What responsibilities has God given you so far?

Other ways to clarify God's mission for you include:

- Pray and read the Scripture. Ask God directly what He expects of you.
- Take time to dream. What would you love to see God do through you? Who would you like to be like?
- If you keep a journal, go over it and pick out themes. If not, start a collection of notes, quotes, ideas and verses that stand out to you.
- Visualise your funeral and ask what you would like people to be saying about you.

Here is my attempt to spell out my direction at the moment. It has evolved over many years. Your mission from God may not be as detailed as mine.

MY GOD-GIVEN MISSION

I have a heart to authentically follow Jesus and am committed to:

- living with integrity and reality,
- teaching and modelling biblically-based spirituality and ministry practice,
- investing wisdom in the next generation of leaders, and
- growing a God-pleasing culture.

Core values of my mission include:

- Being real and open and passionate about life and ministry
- Having a few deep friends who share love, life, God and vision
- Challenging the status quo and being an agent of steady, God-directed change
- Being a broad stream that accepts and integrates a wide variety of people and ideas
- Using every God-given opportunity to lead, teach, equip and mentor
- Intentionally investing my life and experience in the next generation of leaders (starting with my sons)
- Growing and using spiritual authority and wisdom

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 4.3

1. Have you seen any gifts emerging as you serve others?
2. Are you aware of any limiting weaknesses that may be holding back your influence?

study 4

Intentionality and CROP

We have explored how to work with God in producing a good CROP. It involves going deeper in relying on Jesus, getting stronger in our determination to obey and serve Jesus to the end despite the cost and opposition, and doing better by using our gifts, overcoming our limiting weaknesses, and pursuing our God-given mission. None of this happens by chance. Growing our CROP is a huge challenge and requires a great deal of intentionality.

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Intentionality is linked to the biblical concept of “self-control.” Biblical leaders are not to be governed by their desires or their environment, but are to control themselves so that they can pursue what is right and good. In writing to both Timothy and Titus about the qualifications for elders, Paul emphasised the importance of self-control:

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach... (1 Tim. 3:2)

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. (Tit. 1:8)

In 2 Pet. 1:3-11, Peter argues that while God provides the power for us to live his way, we have an important role to play in developing qualities that add to our faith and keep us from “being ineffective and unproductive” (2 Pet. 1:8). Below is Peter’s list of qualities. One of these key qualities is self-control, but you will notice that intentionality (“make every effort”) really lies behind the development of all these qualities:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

There are numerous personal disciplines that boost self-control and intentionality in Christians of

influence. Many of these are highlighted throughout the seven passions of Christian influencers. I will just deal here with three key issues.

1. Take responsibility for your choices and behaviour. Intentionality starts with taking responsibility. If you see your life as being controlled by external circumstances like people or situations or work or experiences or even your personality, then you'll always have good reasons for not being intentional. For example, the poor steward who buried his talent tried to blame his master for his failure (Matt. 25:24-25).

I'm not saying that external circumstances don't have an impact. Of course they do. Our circumstances may prevent us achieving many things. We have to be realistic. But we are responsible to do what God calls us to do and must not blame our personality or circumstances for our lack of completion. God holds us accountable for this. We will be judged by him, in part, on the basis of what we have done with our lives (Rev. 20:12), so we are responsible.

We are responsible for our actions, God is responsible for the final result.

Ultimately, our behaviour is a product of our decisions, not our conditions. Our choices are determining how we live and what we achieve. Until we are willing to take complete responsibility for our lives, the work we are doing, and the way we do this work, we will never be able to manage our lives effectively.

I realise that in the module on GRACE, I said that ultimately this is God's work, not ours. It is his responsibility. Now I'm saying that we are completely responsible. Isn't this a contradiction? Not at all. We are responsible for our actions; God is responsible for the final result. God runs the show, but we are accountable to play our part well.

2. Intentionally pursue your mission. A previous generation of leaders often pursued their mission by designing precise personal goals and strategies. If you use such methods systematically, they certainly aid the intentional achievement of your mission. For example, one of the core values of my mission is to build a few close friendships. If I did not have these friends, I could plan to evaluate my friendship options, spend time with the five most likely people, and within 12 months find two friends to share my life with. I know this sounds dispassionate and somewhat contrived. It's not the only way. But in practice it would ensure that I worked intentionally on this core value. As long as I continued to pray and was genuine in my relationships with friends, I may well find a couple of God-given friends that I could share life with.

New generation influencers are generally less comfortable with this approach. They don't particularly like such structured personal planning. It feels too formulaic and limiting. Such methods may be necessary in large organisations (more on this later), but they are not seen to be helpful in personal life and relationships. New generation influencers prefer a compass to a map. They would be comfortable having a broad goal to find a few close friends, but would not be looking for a detailed plan to achieve this. They would prefer to spend lots of time with people, build closer

relationships as God leads, and see what happens. They wouldn't want to be restricted to some formulaic plan that restricts flexibility.

I have a lot of sympathy with the approach of new generation influencers. I doubt that Jesus operated with a strategic plan. He mostly worked more with a "compass" than a detailed "map." He seemed to be very flexible in his approach to mission. But Jesus was strongly intentional, and when called by God, he deliberately pursued specific directions. For example, he headed stubbornly towards Jerusalem and suffering despite efforts by his disciples to dissuade him (Matt. 16:21-23).

So don't feel that you need to have an elaborate plan to achieve your mission, but make sure that you're heading in the right direction. The best way to do this is to have some form of accountability. Who is checking whether you are pursuing God's mission? Be flexible if you want, but make sure that you are intentional. You won't reap a great CROP without intentionally pursuing your mission from God.

3. Use your time well. Even if you choose to live mainly with freedom and flexibility, you do need to work out how to manage your time. There has been so much written on time management that I hesitate to add anything. Everyone develops their own methods and priorities in managing time. But time is a key resource and to serve God effectively as his steward, you need to have some control over your time, so here are a couple of basics.

Have a method of writing things down and organising your life. I use a diary and a "to do" list. Some people have much more sophisticated methods. Phone/tablet apps offer lots of options and computer programs can also assist. Try to sync everything together if you can. Having two or three systems that you are operating can make things complicated and less efficient. If you don't have a method for organising your life, you need to get one immediately.

Draw some boundaries. If you are effective in what you do, you will find people wanting you to do lots more. If you can't say, "No", you will end up with reduced time to pursue your mission. Many times, Jesus, moved by compassion, did what people wanted, but on other occasions he turned his back and walked away from the crowds and their desires and demands. He drew his boundaries.

Build in time for activities that are very important but not urgent. The pace and pressure of life mean that we can spend a lot of time dealing with the urgent. You must intentionally build in time for renewing activities like exercising, time with friends, time with God, reading, holidays, coffee shops, recreation, and even partying. You also need time for planning, tidying up, thinking, listening, praying and retreating. All these activities will actually vitalise and empower your influence, so they are essential even though they may never demand immediate attention.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 4.4

1. Do you tend to be more organised and disciplined or more flexible and open? How does this impact your reaction to today's reading on intentionality? Is there anything that you need to do as a result of this reading?

study 5

Producing a CROP with others

So far, we have focused on what we need to do with and for God to produce a personal CROP through our lives. But as Christians of influence, often we are pursuing a CROP with others. We are serving in workplace teams, clubs, youth groups, small groups, parachurch ministries, sporting teams, mission events, etc.

Once we start serving more formally with others, some form of intentional planning and decision-making becomes necessary for the group to produce a CROP. So as our influence grows and we take on more formal leadership roles, we need to develop skills that will enable a good CROP as a group together. I will deal with many of these skills in TEAM, but here I will discuss basic skills in strategic planning and organising a meeting. If we are to serve others and effectively pursue a common mission with them, we need these skills.

Setting and achieving goals

I have been involved in leading Christian organisations and ministries for over 40 years (I must have started as a toddler), so I've had to develop considerable organisational skills. My world has been full of vision statements and strategic plans and staff guidelines and finance budgets.

I have a love/hate relationship with the whole institutional thing. On the one hand I long to be free to follow the wind of the Spirit, yet on the other hand I appreciate the intentionality and accountability required to effectively utilise the God-given resources of an organisation. I personally think that we are often far too undisciplined and unintentional in what we do in Christian organisations

Whether you are organising a social event or building a workplace team, or leading a major church ministry, here is some basic advice on setting and achieving goals as a team.

1. Focus on limited goals. We often try to do too much and find ourselves so stretched or distracted that we don't do anything well. If you are leading a ministry or team, God has given you

some resources. Ask yourself, “What can we do best with what God has given us?” Pray about this, get a direction, then prune off the good things that you would love to do, but can’t really do well. It is important to nail down what you must do and what you shouldn’t do.

2. Spell out what you’re planning to do. Having honed your specific directions, spell out what you’re planning to achieve (with God’s help), how you’re going to achieve it, and when it will happen. This will take time, but without a plan I can guarantee that you will be side-tracked and lose focus. Make your plan simple, concentrating on the important issues. A method I have found useful is to spell out:

- The general goal;
- The strategies to achieve that goal;
- By whom and when the strategies will be implemented; and
- The results (what it will look like when the goal is achieved).

3. Make yourself accountable. Decide who will keep you accountable to follow your plan. It may be a governing board, a leadership team, a boss or a friend. But if no-one checks, your focus and plan will easily be forgotten under the pressure of immediate tasks and needs. Make yourself accountable.

God is immensely pleased when your passion to see a CROP involves a new commitment to make the most of all the opportunities and resources God provides for you and the people you serve. So please be intentional. The time is short and the opportunities are immense. Ask God what he wants you to do together, and intentionally pursue it with all your heart and energy.

Running meetings

Meetings are the places where issues get discussed and decisions get made together as a team. Meetings become necessary when people work on goals together. There is little chance of a good team CROP if productive meetings don’t occur. Here are some basic guidelines about running a meeting.

1. Decide whether the meeting will be formal or informal. Formal meetings follow a strict set of rules and procedures that are policed by a chairperson. Motions will be presented correctly, discussion will be limited by rules, and decisions will be made by vote. Informal meetings don’t have set procedures for decision-making, but will have a chair, operate according to an agenda, informally make decisions and record these decisions. I prefer a more informal approach to most meetings because it engenders an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. However, if trust is not present or systems require it, formal structures may be more effective.

2. Decide who will set the agenda and who will chair the meeting. While in theory the chair is impartial, in fact the chair has great influence in a meeting. For example, the chair can set the agenda, set the tone of the meeting, introduce the issues, direct the discussion, and decide how a discussion will conclude and how the issue will be resolved. As meetings become less formal, the influence of the chair grows because there are no rules governing the meeting; nothing external for

the participants to appeal to. The choice of an effective chair is crucial.

3. Decide who will record the decisions. No matter how informal the meeting, some method of recording decisions is vital. If decisions are not recorded, some issues will be discussed again, participants will arrive at different conclusions, and some decisions will not be implemented. The decisions can be recorded by a minute secretary who is not a participant in the discussion, by a designated member of the meeting, or by the chairperson.

4. Keep the meeting moving. Meetings can easily become bogged down with dogmatic members, unfocussed discussions, unimportant issues, and unnecessary banter. Don't let anyone dominate and try to stick to time. There is a place for fun, but make sure you get the job done. Meetings involve a huge amount of resources if you count the time of everyone present. Be a good steward of those resources.

5. Cover the basics. Basic aspects of most meetings include prayer, possibly a devotion, checking the decisions of the last meeting, giving reports on what has happened since the last meeting, continuing discussion of unfinished issues, discussion of new issues, and deciding when the next meeting will be.

Not everyone enjoys meetings, **but productive meetings will greatly help in the development of strong team CROP.** It's important to do meetings well.

So as God resources us as his stewards, he is looking for a good CROP from his investment. To produce CROP personally, we go deeper with Jesus, get stronger in following Jesus and do better at pursuing Jesus' call on our lives. To produce CROP together with those we influence in organisations and ministries, we also need to develop skills in planning and in running meetings.

How CROP serves followers

But what has producing CROP got to do with influence? The qualities and skills described in this chapter make us more effective in stewarding God's resources and producing kingdom results, but what is the spinoff for those who are following us? How does CROP help us serve those we influence?

To produce CROP personally, we go deeper with Jesus, get stronger in following Jesus and do better at pursuing Jesus' call on our lives.

If you are effective at what God calls you to do and produce a CROP that others recognise, those who you influence will tend to respond in two positive ways.

1. Admiration

The first response will be admiration and respect. It will become obvious to them that you are doing a good job, that you can work with God to make a difference, that God really does use you.

People will be more willing to invest in you and your God-given mission if they believe that you can take them somewhere that will make a difference for God.

Producing CROP doesn't mean that you are completely changing the world or that everything you do meets with outstanding success. Of course, you're learning and developing and have a long way to go.

But over time they will see that you are making effective use of your time and resources and that you are developing your gifts well. They will see your growth in CROP and be appreciative of your contribution to God's kingdom. This will result in an emerging sense of respect and admiration for you. They will see you as someone who can make a difference, who God is using. This will encourage those you influence and will build your reputation as someone who is worth following. More people will want to get on board with you.

2. Achievement

The second response will be a sense of achievement for them. As people follow you, they will find that together with you they can produce a CROP. Some of your plans together are achieved. Some of your hard work together bears fruit. It gives people a strong sense of excitement and faith when they find that God actually uses them to make a difference.

You see people don't want to invest continually and work incessantly just to keep the wheels turning, just to mark time. They want to make a difference, to achieve something with God. When they can join forces with someone who will help them succeed, they find a great sense of fulfilment, and this increases their keenness to follow (to be influenced).

The biblical Operating System (GRACE, LOVE and HEART) is foundational to Christian influence, but your sphere of influence will be limited unless your CROP (our first App) grows. **People will be more willing to invest in you and your God-given mission if they believe that you can take them somewhere that will make a difference for God.**

If those you are seeking to influence are not yet Christians, the CROP God produces through you will still have a significant impact on how willingly they accept your influence. They may not understand that you are a steward of God's resources, but they will know what effective influence looks like, and they will admire and follow influencers who are able to discipline themselves and work efficiently to achieve results, especially if those who follow share in the benefits of these results.

My personal reflection

CROP is my favourite passion to talk about because it's the one that comes most naturally to me. I feel that I have more credibility teaching on CROP than many of the other passions. **I do seek to work closely with Jesus. I am determined to stay true to God's calling and gospel while he gives me life.** I am intentional and disciplined about the way I live my life. At one stage, I was senior pastor of a large church, lecturing part-time at a seminary, and completing a doctorate. My focus and discipline (along with a gracious God) enabled these ministries to prosper despite all the pressure.

In keeping with the gifts and calling God has given me, he has used me to build a significant youth ministry (over 9 years), grow a large church (over 14 years), and develop an expanding theological institution (over 16 years). I have not had any immediate successes, but the CROP has come. Of course, many Christian leaders have achieved far more than I have and have much wider influence, but I believe that I have been a good steward of the resources that God has given me.

Good stewardship has been a focus of Christian leaders of my generation. We reacted against a previous generation of leaders to whom faithfulness to tradition was all that mattered, no matter how effective or ineffective it really was. We wanted to make a kingdom difference, not uphold the status quo. We worked hard and smart and changed as much as we could. Perhaps we could have relied on God more, but we were determined, disciplined and intentional about what we did and God's CROP flowed and people followed. Today's megachurches are probably the most obvious CROP of this generation of leaders.

Now a new generation of leaders has emerged that is concerned about the drivenness and task orientation of my generation. They are looking for relationships more than achievements, and shared causes rather than big goals. The heroic leader is now not admired as much. Personally, I think that their passions are biblical and that they provide a healthy correction to some of my generation's concerning extremes. **But the new generation of leaders must not ignore the biblical passion of CROP. As Christians of influence, we are stewards of God's resources and he is expecting us to work with him to produce a significant CROP.**

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 4.5

Checkpoint 4: CROP

TOTAL:

Please rate each statement on the following scale:

- 5 - Strongly Agree;
- 4 - Agree;
- 3 - Neither Agree nor Disagree;
- 2 - Disagree;
- 1 - Strongly Disagree

TOTAL the scores for each quality and put the total in the box. This gives a score out of 25. A score below 20 indicates significant room for growth.

1. I am deeply dependent on Jesus in the things I do.

2. I willingly discipline my life and make the necessary sacrifices to grow a CROP.

3. I have a fair idea of my gifts and the mission that God has called me to.

4. I have methods and systems in place to make sure that I use my life proficiently.

5. Others can see that God is using my life to produce a CROP.

Describe briefly what you have learned about CROP as essential for Christian leaders. Reflect on your self-assessment (above) and discuss the steps you are taking (or will take) to develop CROP.

Discussion Questions: Crop

Choose the most appropriate questions.

- 1.** What issues have the readings and journaling raised for you? Share your answers, thoughts and questions.
- 2.** Share your response to Journal Activity 4.5.
- 3.** Who do you know who you believe is producing a CROP for God (whether in a large or small context)? What can you learn from them? (Maybe you could talk to them and find out what they're doing.)
- 4.** Who do you think you are most like in the parable of the talents - the five talent guy, the two talent guy, or the one talent guy? Why?
- 5.** What are the main obstacles to producing a good CROP? Which is most likely to stop you growing as a leader and continuing to increase your sphere of influence?
- 6.** How are you organising your life? How do you make sure that your time counts? What systems or structures are helpful for you? Is there anything else you should be doing?
- 7.** What are your strengths as a Christian of influence? How are you focusing on these strengths? Do you have any weaknesses that need to be worked on (character weaknesses, weaknesses impacting your ministry, area of weakness that are part of the mission that you have)?
- 8.** Do you have any idea of God's mission for you? What are your goals at the moment?
- 9.** What is the most important thing you need to do to be a better steward of the gifts and resources God has given you?

Case Studies: Crop

Choose the most relevant case studies to discuss.

- 1.** Richard is a very charismatic leader who the young adults love, but he just can't get himself organised. He's late for activities (even the ones he organises) and often double books. No-one says anything because everyone likes him so much, but Richard feels that he's losing credibility with some of the team. He's tried using a diary but it just doesn't work for him. Would he be better focusing on his strengths or does he need to get this organisation thing right?
- 2.** Katie has been through goal-setting retreats with her team every January for the last three years, but they never seem to make any difference. The year starts with good intentions, but then everyone gets swamped with commitments and it's really just a matter of survival. Katie is wondering whether setting goals is a waste of time or whether there's something wrong with her approach. What would you advise?
- 3.** Jono heads up a very effective outreach ministry to the skate boarders in the area. His team is highly motivated and has seen incredible fruit including some drastically transformed kids. You are keen to find out what makes his leadership so successful, but every time you talk to Jono, he just says that it is not his influence, but is God's grace at work - that he doesn't really know what he is doing. Is this true? Can ineffective influencers be powerfully used by God, or are there always some reasons for producing a CROP?
- 4.** Lisa works really hard in her office and is liked by almost everyone. She tries to serve Jesus in her job and is efficient in the work she is assigned. She wants to increase her influence and believes that she is ready for new challenges. Yet she keeps getting passed over when promotion opportunities come along. Lisa is happy to follow Jesus whatever role he gives her but thinks that her gifts and experience are suitable for a position of greater influence. Should she pray and wait or are there things she could do to increase her chances of promotion?
- 5.** The meetings Amelia runs are rather shambolic but she doesn't seem to notice or care. They never start on time, the discussions go all over the place, people talk over the top of each other and no-one is ever sure about the decisions that are made. It frustrates you but you are just a member of the team. Would you talk to Amelia about this, and if so, what would you say?