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SHEDDING DIVINE LIGHT ON THE DARK SIDE

If we are ever going to understand the sources and effects of our dark side well enough to overcome it and keep it from destroying our ability to lead for God's glory, we must seriously consider God's original design for us and the corruption of that design, which resulted from the very first leadership failure.

The First Leadership Failure

God's original intent for humanity was to exercise leadership in his created order:

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

Genesis 1:26

God originally placed human beings on the earth to serve as rulers. The Hebrew word for *rule* in Genesis 1:26 comes from the root word that means to exercise dominion. It was a word frequently used in the Old Testament in reference to Israel's ruling over other nations and being the source of authority and direction for them.¹ This rulership that God granted to Adam was not limited to merely the oversight of animal and plant life but extended to every living thing on the earth. Scripture records that God blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over *every living thing* that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28, emphasis ours).

Clearly God intended humans to be more than just managers. There is an implied sense that they were responsible to do the right things with the earth and all that was on and in it, the divine resource they had been given. Adam and Eve were responsible to see that life on earth was conducted as God would want it conducted had he been physically in charge himself. That is the role of leadership: to do the right things, not merely to do things right.²

Unfortunately that first experiment in human leadership did not end successfully. As with all leaders and the environments in which they lead, there were certain parameters placed on Adam and Eve. The parameters were established for their own protection, not simply to make their task more difficult. God's command was certain: "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16–17).

Rather than remain content to exercise their considerable authority within God's established parameters, they chose to challenge those parameters.

The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be

opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3:4-6

The reason for this challenge to the parameters God had established was the need they felt to gain equal status with God. Simply put, the first human leadership failure was the result of unrestrained pride and selfishness with a healthy dose of self-deception. With several variations and minor additions, these provide the raw material for our dark side.

Raw Material for the Dark Side

There are many scriptural admonitions that warn us of our fallen human tendencies toward pride, selfishness, self-deception, and wrong motives.

Pride

Solomon, a leader who clearly struggled against his dark side, speaks with a measure of experience and personal insight when he writes, "When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom" (Prov. 11:2). He also addressed the destructive nature of pride when he wrote, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov. 16:18-19). Pride in Scripture is almost exclusively linked with failure and stumbling. It is one of the human traits about which God has expressly declared his hatred in Proverbs 6:16-18. "There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him," and the first characteristic singled out in this infamous list is "haughty eyes" (pride) closely followed by another of our raw materials

for the dark side, “a heart that devises wicked plans” (wrong motives). In fact so repulsive to God is the person swollen with pride that the writer of Proverbs also says that “everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 16:5). If these statements were not enough to convince us of the evil of pride, we’re also told that “a man’s pride will bring him low” (Prov. 29:23).

Though pride is without a doubt the foundation on which the dark side is built and extremely destructive when left unchecked, it is also an area that many Christian leaders ignore when it comes to accountability to others. The insidious nature of pride is such that Christian leaders believe they do not struggle with it. Or if they do, certainly not to the same extent that others do.

Pride seems to be one of the constant components of every human personality that irresistibly begins early in life to drive us. It is one of the elements of our dark side that Scripture indicates can cause serious difficulties not only in our exercise of leadership but also in our daily living. It can safely be said that pride is the primal sin. It was pride that caused Lucifer to challenge God’s authority resulting in his rejection from heaven, thus creating the seeds that have germinated into all manner of human evil (Ezek. 28:17). But pride is not the only raw material used in the manufacture of our dark side.

Selfishness

If there is a close second to pride when it comes to our dark side, it is our all-consuming selfishness. We are born with a natural bent toward gratifying ourselves, and beginning with our hungry, demanding cries during infancy, that bent is to some degree reinforced throughout our early years of life. We learn as babies that all we must do to gratify our needs is to cry and someone will be there to satisfy us and stop the crying. Unfortunately it is a habit that is hard to break as we grow older.

Scripture tells us that selfishness, like pride, will end in our own disaster.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are *selfishly ambitious* and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Romans 2:5-8 (emphasis ours)

Though we are all aware of the selfishness underlying many of our choices, it is never easy to admit and is something we work hard as leaders to hide. Like a hungry shark being careful to keep its telltale dorsal fin just below the surface so as not to reveal its location to a potentially gratifying meal, we become adept at keeping our selfishness carefully submerged so as not to reveal our true motives. But just as the famished shark will eventually break the surface in an explosion of fins, blood, and boiling water, so selfishness will ultimately result in chaos in our leadership.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. . . . For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

James 3:14, 16

The disciples James and John experienced the disorder that selfishness can bring to the leader's relationships. Though they were handpicked for leadership by Jesus himself and were exposed to his perfect, selfless example, they were still overcome by selfishness.

James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of

You.” And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.”

Mark 10:35–37

On learning about James and John’s selfish request for special consideration and recognition from Jesus, “the ten began to feel indignant with James and John” (v. 41). Selfish leaders always leave chaos and disorder in their wake.

It is natural to rationalize and hide our selfishness, but doing so only leads to trouble. We need to admit it and overcome it. As the apostle Paul says:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3–4

Self-Deception and Wrong Motives

Solomon writes in Proverbs, “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives” (Prov. 16:2). There seems to be a sense in which leaders can always justify their plans and goals as good and right. As human beings we have an inherent ability to deceive ourselves. Thus equipped we are capable of transforming even the most selfishly motivated action into an act of sacrificial altruism in our own minds. Jeremiah tells us, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). The clear answer to Jeremiah’s rhetorical question is that no one can understand the treacherous dealings of the human heart. We cannot even fully understand our own heart and motives. The unhappy truth is that all too often we are not that interested in probing our motives too deeply for fear of what we might find.

The apostle Paul seems to agree with Jeremiah's assessment when he tells the Corinthians, people known for judging the motives of others:

To me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4

Paul is not saying that he never engages in self-examination of his motives, but quite to the contrary, even though he examines himself and finds nothing against himself, this does not necessarily mean he is not guilty of wrong motives. Paul recognized that his heart was deceitful. Thus he would leave all final judgment up to the Lord.

Jesus himself said that it is out of our heart, or our inner being, that all sorts of deceptions and evil are born. Jesus on one occasion told his disciples:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

Mark 7:21-22

There is a comprehensive list of materials for the human dark side.

From a biblical perspective then, what does it look like when these raw materials are combined to form the dark side? What does the finished product look like?

The Raw Materials at Work

The Bible never covers up the sins of God's people. Contrary to what some expect, it exposes numerous leaders who

experienced significant failure as the direct result of their dark side.

Saul

Saul experienced significant failure as a leader. His downfall was precipitated by his disobedience to God's clear commands regarding holy warfare. Saul thought that he was somehow above the need to wait for the prophet Samuel to make a sacrifice at Gilgal before going to war, and that arrogant attitude marked the beginning of the end of Saul's leadership. Saul continued in arrogance when he failed to obey the command to totally destroy Amalek. Again thinking he was somehow above the law, he decided it would be acceptable to disobey in a limited way (1 Samuel 9–15).

It was after these episodes of disobedience that his leadership of the nation was wrested from him. He was rejected by God as the leader of the people, God's Spirit was removed from him, and he began to experience severe bouts of anxiety, depression, and paranoia.³ In the later stages of his leadership his paranoia became so consuming that it had a destructive impact not only on him, but also on his son Jonathan; on his imagined rival, David; and on the entire nation.

In Saul's personality and behavior we see signs of pride, selfishness, self-deception, personal insecurity, low self-worth, and extreme paranoia. Not even his selection by God, the gifting of God, or his natural ability was enough to neutralize the dark side of his personality. Paradoxically, Saul's initial humility, in spite of his being extremely handsome and gifted, no doubt contributed to God's selection of him as the nation's leader and to his initial effectiveness. And yet in the end what made him great—his special call and his ability—conspired against him to cause his failure. He began to believe that he was above God's laws and the obedience required of others. Though the life and leadership of Saul provide an interesting biblical case

study in the dangers of the dark side, he is by no means its only victim.

David

King David also periodically battled with his dark side, resulting in humiliating personal defeats and devastating national consequences. His pride as a leader caused him to take a census of his warriors in direct violation of God's command, leading to the needless death of many innocent people. His selfishness consumed him as he committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband, and then deceived himself as he covered up his sin for nearly a year until he was finally confronted by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 11–12; 24).

However, in spite of his frequent battles with the dark side, it seems that David was aware of his dark side and was willing to deal honestly with himself before God. After his pride-generated numbering of his warriors and the tragedy that resulted, the Scripture records, "Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly'" (2 Sam. 24:10).

We also see indications of David's self-awareness and corrective action in Psalms 32 and 51. But in spite of the fact that David did not experience failure on the same scale as Saul, his dark side did lead to failures that had far-reaching effects on himself, his extended family, and the nation.

In addition to Saul and David there are numerous other biblical leaders who waged war against their dark side. The evidence would seem to indicate that Solomon struggled against a narcissistic personality⁴ and Moses seems to have battled a compulsive personality.⁵ Both of these biblical leaders also suffered negative consequences as a direct result of their dark side getting the upper hand in the exercise of their leadership. There are numerous other leaders throughout the Scriptures

who struggled in similar ways with the dark side of their personality, some more successfully than others.

Light That Brings Understanding

Even with this very limited amount of scriptural light being shed on the human dark side, it becomes even clearer that anyone who aspires to leadership, particularly spiritual leadership, needs to become fully aware of the raw materials that go into the creation of the leader's dark side and how those have been mingled during the course of his or her lifetime with issues from the family of origin, personal experiences, and a unique personality to create his or her dark side. This understanding is necessary to be able to take defensive measures to prevent the dark side from causing significant leadership failure.

How do pride, selfishness, self-deception, and wrong motives combine with our personality and life experiences to manufacture our dark side? What are the signs of its presence in our life and leadership? It is to these questions we now turn our attention.

TARGETING INSIGHTS

- The human dark side is rooted in the beginning of history as recorded in Genesis 1–3. Pride, selfishness, self-deception, and wrong motives are the raw materials of which the dark side consists.
- The fall of many leaders described in the Bible is directly attributable to components of their dark side. Because of the providence of God, some leaders do at times carry out their leadership responsibilities in spite of their dark side.
- Leaders who are aware of their dark side and are willing to deal openly and honestly with it before God are empowered for greater effectiveness.

APPLYING INSIGHTS

Do you identify more with Saul or with David? In what ways do you see yourself in each of them? Is your approach to your own dark side more like Saul's or David's? What would you like your approach to be in the future?

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HOW THE DARK SIDE DEVELOPS

As we have seen in the previous chapter, contrary to much contemporary thought, every leader possesses within him or her the raw material necessary for the manufacture of the dark side. None of us are immune. We are not, as some would suggest, “whole” at birth, only to be tainted by cultural and sociological influences as we experience life.¹ But rather, we all enter life with the same primal baggage just waiting to be unpacked, hung on the hangers of our life experiences, and finally placed in the closet that is our dark side. The issue is not so much whether or not anyone is immune to the effects of the dark side, but what it is that causes every leader to be affected differently. What allows some leaders to lead for a lifetime relatively unscathed while others meet with devastating failures? For example, Jim Bakker and Bill Hybels

have both struggled with the dark side in the exercise of their leadership but have experienced completely different results; one a humiliating failure, the other significant, seemingly balanced success. Though every leader must do battle with pride, selfishness, self-deception, and wrong motives, what is it that causes some leaders to stumble so tragically, while others are able to maintain their balance and keep these primal forces in check?

Without doubt, much of what determines how a leader's dark side will develop, as well as how he or she will deal with that dark side once in leadership, stems from the family the person grew up in and his or her childhood years through adolescence. As we grow toward adulthood, our dark side begins to develop silently, only to emerge fully at some future date, often after leadership has been attained. As author Robert A. Johnson says: "... somewhere early on our way, we eat one of the wonderful fruits of the tree of knowledge, things separate into good and evil, and we begin the shadow-making process; we divide our lives."²

The critical factor in how our dark side will impact our leadership is the extent to which we learn about its development and understand how it influences us. If it is true that each of us will develop a shadow, or dark side, then what are the signs of its presence in our life?

Signs of Our Shadow Side

Though we may not be aware of its presence, we have been impacted by the dark side throughout our life. There are definite signs we can become sensitive to that will help us identify the unique ways it has developed over the years as well as the specific shape it has taken in our life. Often we are conscious of these signs in our motivations and recognize their influence on our behavior, yet we are not quite able to make a solid connection between them and their source.

Many of us in positions of leadership or aspiring to leadership have sensed at one time or another a vague, inexplicable drive to make a significant mark with our lives. At times we can even begin to describe what it is we are driven to achieve. But a complete description always seems to elude us, and we just continue to be pulled along by this unidentified but powerful force toward some ultimate goal of which we are not completely aware. This vague sense of ambition is a sign that our dark side is alive and well. But there are others.

Some leaders experience a profound need to be approved by those they lead and to know that they are accepted and appreciated. This is not just the ordinary, normal desire we all possess to be liked by others but rather a desperate, almost life-sustaining need to gain approval. It is another sign that the "shadow-making" process, as Robert Johnson refers to it, has taken place.

For others it may be an irrational fear that their work is not adequate, so they are driven to work even harder and longer to prevent their irrational fear from becoming a reality. A symptom of the dark side for others may be a need to feel in absolute control of every circumstance and event. This need to be in control often extends beyond the workplace and into family life and relationships, becoming a need to control other people. A tendency toward perfectionism and many other behaviors such as overeating, compulsive spending, alcoholism, and compulsive exercise are all signals that should be explored.

In short any behavior that seems to overpower us, as well as any urge or motivation that seems to uncontrollably drive us, is a possible sign indicating the presence of our dark side. How do these inner urges and compulsions develop to such a point? The shadow-making process is not a solo act; it is truly a family affair.

A Family Affair

If pride, selfishness, self-deceit, and wrong motives are the crucial ingredients in the recipe for our dark side, then our family—and our developmental years in that family—most certainly provides the catalyst for this mixture that determines the final shape our dark side will take. With rare exception the experiences of our childhood determine the degree to which we are controlled by the dark side of our personality and how it manifests itself when it comes to the exercise of leadership. This is true of even the most popular and powerful leaders.

One of the most idealized leaders of the twentieth century was John F. Kennedy. After a rapid rise through the ranks of Congress he was elected to the most powerful position of leadership in the world at an amazingly early age. He launched the United States on a quest to conquer the final frontier of space, set the pace at the beginning of the Cold War, and left an indelible mark on the American psyche. Yet for all of his achievements, John Kennedy was driven by his dark side. It has only been since his death, after decades of research into previously unavailable documents, that the American public has learned to what extent this was true.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born to Joseph P. and Rose Kennedy, the second of nine children. The Kennedy family provided young John with an environment in which his dark side would not only develop but also flourish and be encouraged. Clare Boothe Luce, wife of the famous publishing magnate Henry Luce, once described the Kennedy family as one in which there was "ambition and pride and human wreckage, such dedication to the best and lapses into the mire of life; such vulgar, noble, driven, generous, self-centered, loving, suspicious, devious, honorable, vulnerable, indomitable people."³

The greatest influence on the young president's life was his father. He was a powerful and wealthy man yet one who never thought he had completely arrived at the high station he deserved in life, always feeling the outsider in Boston high

society. Though he had achieved great success from a material standpoint, it was not enough. As a result of this low self-image, which bordered on paranoia, he was determined to find his greater success and acceptance through the lives and successes of his sons. In an effort to guarantee that his sons succeed and provide him with the level of social acceptance he so desperately needed, Joe Kennedy created an environment that fostered sibling competition—the winners were rewarded with paternal affection. In fact the primary motivation throughout much of the sons' lives was gaining the approval of their father. "What mattered most to the four sons, in their early years, was their competition for the love and applause of their father."⁴

In addition to the need young John felt to gain his father's approval, which was never easily won, there were other formative influences at work in his childhood. His father was a known adulterer, often maintaining sordid relationships with numerous women, even defiantly flaunting them before his wife and family. Once young John Kennedy got stuck on the family sailboat as his father was leaving for a sail with movie star Gloria Swanson, one of his mistresses. John hid himself below deck only to peek out from his hiding place to see his father engaged in sexual relations with the young starlet. He was so horrified by what he saw, he jumped overboard and started swimming out to sea.⁵ Joe encouraged his sons to demonstrate their manhood in the same way he did. Illicit sex was never frowned on but encouraged as a badge of power and virility. The sons even provided young women for their father's pleasure and on many occasions shared the women with him.

But those were not the only influences that were seminal in the shaping of Kennedy's dark side. There were also the lessons of winning at any cost, tailoring the truth to one's own advantage, and the privileges of money and power. These among numerous other influences created a dark side to John Kennedy's personality. His entire adult life was nothing more than a veiled quest for his father's approval, from his need to achieve

during his school years to his rapid ascent up the ladder of political power.

Once he attained the ultimate position of power, his dark side became evident to those around him. As president, he too flaunted his adulterous affairs before his wife.⁶ Had his term not been cut short by tragedy, it is likely that his dark side would eventually have created serious problems for him, the Prince of Camelot. One political insider said, "The whole dark side of John Kennedy wouldn't emerge until after his death. . . . We had hints of it; we saw it around the edges. . . . Then we began to see it. You just connected the dots, and there was a picture there."⁷

The Needs That Drive Us

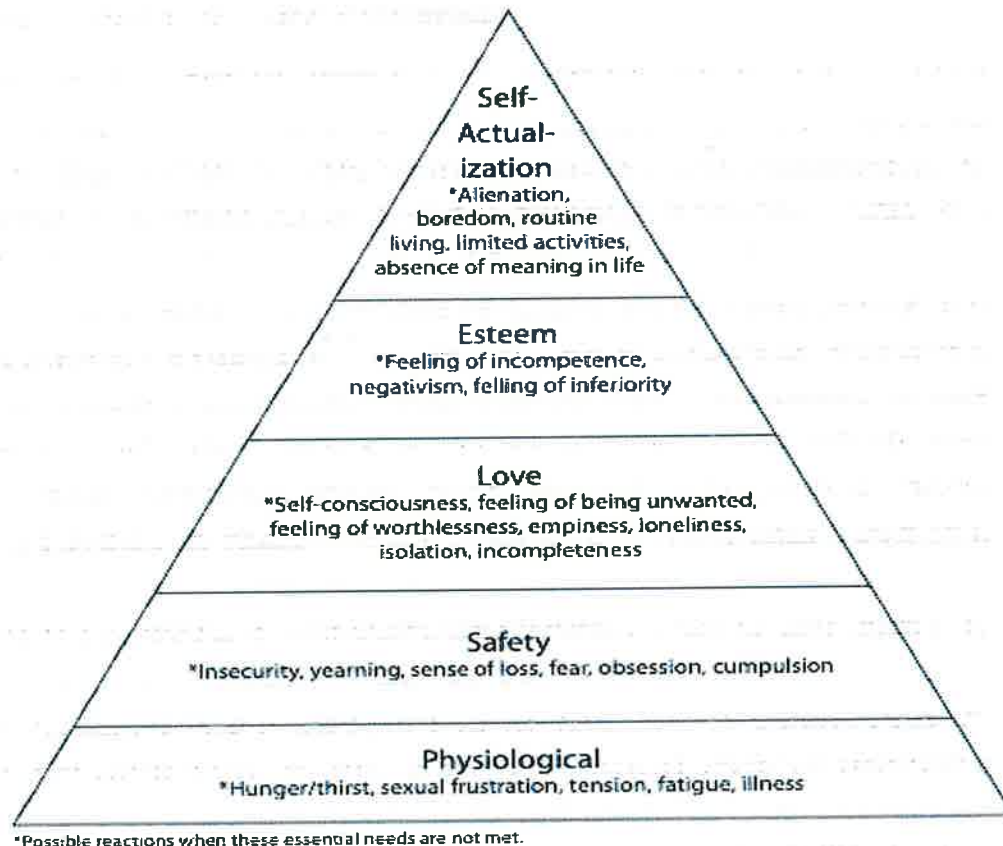
As in the case of John F. Kennedy, there are experiences and influences during our childhood and adolescent years that combine with the primal raw materials present in each of us to develop our dark side. Though each of our family backgrounds and experiences are different, we have common needs and wants that make us vulnerable to events that threaten us in some way. These events cause us to respond to our different formative experiences in different ways that ultimately produce our unique dark side.

A Pyramid of Needs

The concept of the hierarchy of needs, developed by Abraham Maslow, is familiar to most leaders who have taken an introductory psychology course, but fewer leaders are aware of the significant role this familiar concept plays in the development of their dark side.

Maslow postulated that every person operates on the basis of a pyramid of needs and wants. This pyramid of needs is arranged hierarchically, ranging from basic physiological needs at the base to safety needs, needs for affection and belonging, the

need for esteem, and ultimately the need for self-actualization.⁸ Maslow's thesis is that people must have their needs met at one level of this pyramid before they will move on to satisfy their needs at a higher level.



*Possible reactions when these essential needs are not met.

Figure 1

This quest to satisfy our needs ends only with death. It is not a static process but rather one that is quite dynamic. For example, it is possible to have our basic needs for safety met for a period of time, but that does not mean those needs are satisfied for life. There may come a time when we experience some tragedy or event that threatens our feelings of safety and causes us to revert for a time to a lower level on the pyramid. This can be a real event that we experience firsthand, or it can be a tragedy that has happened to someone else to whom we feel close. Reading about an assault or murder in the neighborhood where we live is one of those events that can cause our

safety need to be threatened even though the attack did not happen directly to us. When we feel unsafe, we revert to that level of need from a higher one.

Missing Blocks in Our Pyramid

As Maslow's pyramid graphically demonstrates, we all have essential needs that must be met. As children and adolescents we do not spend much time contemplating the fulfillment of these needs; it is essentially a subconscious process.⁹ And yet the satisfaction of these needs is vital to our healthy development. What happens when some of these most basic needs are never adequately satisfied? Worse yet, what happens when we experience some traumatic event during our childhood or developmental years that causes us to feel permanently threatened in one of these essential areas, even though that level of need might be satisfied in many other respects? When this happens, we end up with missing blocks in our need pyramid that we will attempt to meet, often subconsciously. This is the heart of how our dark side begins to develop.

When certain events threaten us in one of our need areas or when we are deprived in any way, we should expect meeting that need to become a controlling element of our personality. If threatening events and unmet needs are acknowledged and dealt with openly, meeting the needs can be a healthy process. If, however, we perceive our attempts to meet these unsatisfied needs as a sign of weakness or personal failure or if we are unaware of how to meet these needs, our attempts are often sublimated and begin forming what will become our dark side.

Our need for safety is one of our most basic needs. What happens when we as a child or young adolescent experience abandonment by a parent or the loss of a parent through death? Though we may not be able to adequately process the full impact of that loss on our psyche, we know it would definitely threaten our safety needs. Unless we have an incredibly healthy

family support system that is able to offset our sense of abandonment and reassure us in our need to feel secure, our loss will leave us with a missing block in our need pyramid that we will either consciously or subconsciously attempt to satisfy. Because we cannot regain our lost parent, our efforts to fill in the missing block will likely be redirected to areas that we may be better able to control. For example, we may engage in an endless search for safe and protective people or environments. Though this may seem overly simplistic, it actually happens in many areas of our lives.

A significant number of leaders of the past and present came from rigid homes with unrealistic standards and a perfectionistic parent who withheld approval and signs of love until those perfect standards were attained. This type of environment threatens the need that children have to feel approved and accepted by the most important people in their life—their parents. This withholding of love or lack of demonstrable approval by a parent for whatever reason creates a deep hole within the personality of the child and may launch him or her on a life quest to gain the approval of that parent. Leaders too numerous to mention here, in virtually every field of endeavor, are engaged in a silent and probably subconscious attempt to satisfy their need to gain the approval and acceptance of a parent. Unfortunately, even as these driven leaders are applauded and rewarded for their achievements, because the need that drives them is so deeply embedded and has not even been identified by them, they continue to be obsessively driven to achieve still more.

This same process occurs with virtually any type of unmet need. How many adults today are impacted by unmet needs resulting from a childhood spent in an alcoholic home or a family where physical and emotional abuse took place? Though these individuals are no doubt aware of the dysfunctions that existed in their family system (though some continue in denial all of their lives), it is less likely that they are able to make the direct connection between that family experience and their pyramid of needs. If, however, a connection can be made, these

individuals will be better able to understand how certain of those needs, having not been satisfied, result in the development of their dark side—a dark side that will have a significant influence in the course they chart through adulthood.

A Debt We Cannot Pay

Another important element in the development of our dark side is what is labeled “existential debts,”¹⁰ the belief that our unmet need is our fault and we must somehow satisfy it. An existential debt is created in our life as the result of a particularly traumatic event, again usually experienced in childhood. When parents divorce, for example, often children experience the failure of the parents’ relationship as a personal failure. They quietly blame themselves for the failure of their parents’ marriage: *If I had been more obedient*, they think; *If I had kept my room clean maybe Dad wouldn't have left our house*, they reason. However, because the children were not in reality the cause of the marital split, there is nothing they can do to resolve the problem and compensate for their imagined role in the divorce. It is a debt they feel they owe but one they can never repay since it exists only as a result of their immature reasoning process.

When people feel they owe an existential debt of this nature, it is a powerful contributing factor in the development of their dark side. In many instances their entire adult life will be spent in a subconscious effort to repay the debt. Obviously they believe the more significant their activities and accomplishments are as an adult, the greater the likelihood of repaying the debt.

The great Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi is an example of a highly successful leader who went through life experiencing an existential debt. When he was a very young teenager he was married as the result of a prearranged betrothal. He found that he looked forward with great anticipation to the sexual passion the evenings would hold for him and his young bride. At this

same time his father was deathly ill and Mohandas would spend hours by his father's bedside gently nursing him and providing him with much needed company. On one occasion, after having sat with his father for numerous hours, he was relieved in his vigil by an uncle. Having been relieved of his duties, he was only too anxious to go straight to his marital bed and enjoy the company of his wife. Shortly after having entered his room with his wife, news came that his father had died just moments after he had left. The young Gandhi was gripped by a terrible sense of guilt; he felt that his father had died as a direct result of his lust.¹¹ This experience created an existential debt in Gandhi's life and had a profound impact on the development of his dark side, thus greatly influencing his style of leadership. His lifelong obsession with nonviolent reform was a subconscious attempt to repay this existential debt.

A Pattern Emerges

As one begins to study the development of the dark side, a clear pattern begins to emerge, a pattern that involves four specific stages as shown in the following chart:

Stage	Basic Element of That Stage	Explanation of Stage
Stage One	Needs	The existence of basic needs (see Maslow's need pyramid)
Stage Two	Traumatic experiences	A traumatic experience that threatens the satisfaction of certain needs or leaves us with unmet needs resulting in a "missing block" in our pyramid of needs
Stage Three	Existential debt	The feeling that our unmet need is the result of a personal failure, which creates an emotional debt that we attempt to pay through often unhealthy behaviors during our adult years
Stage Four	Dark side development	The combined effects of these needs, traumatic experiences, and emotional debts result in the ongoing development of our dark side

Now let's take this model and plug in a more concrete example so that we are able to see how the dark side begins to develop in our lives.

As we have seen, we all have a deep need to feel accepted, particularly by those individuals we consider most important in our lives. For Christians this would obviously include God as well as our parents. Let's see how Sam's experiences fit into our model according to the stages we have identified.

Stage One—Needs: One of the needs in Sam's pyramid was to feel approved and accepted by God. Since his early experience taught that God's approval would be expressed through the baptism in the Spirit and the ability to speak in other tongues, this is what he sought.

Stage Two—Traumatic experiences: On many occasions at summer camps and special revival meetings the speakers communicated that God longed to give this gift of Spirit baptism to anyone who wanted it. The highlight of these special meetings was the reception of this coveted gift by seemingly everyone in attendance who had not yet received it. Try as he would, Sam was never able to experience this great blessing. These were traumatic experiences that threatened his deep need to feel approved and accepted by God and resulted in a missing block in his need pyramid.

Stage Three—Existential debt: These traumatic experiences created what for many years was an existential debt that Sam felt he needed to pay. He thought the only possible reason he had not been able to receive the gift of the Spirit like everyone else was because he had done something very wrong. Sam believed for most of his teen years that the reason God had not given him this ultimate stamp of approval was because he had committed the unpardonable sin. That is a pretty serious debt to be faced with as a teenager.

Stage Four—Dark side development: This existential debt resulted in a frantic search for God's approval and blessing and a subconscious attempt to pay this debt. What better way to pay this debt than to enter full-time Christian service? Certainly

God would have to smile on Sam then. However, because the debt was so great, he was driven to achieve exceptional success, which eventually led to his emotional explosion described earlier. This is simply an example of how one event, combined with other dynamics—such as Sam's need to please and his tendency toward perfectionism as modeled by his father, as well as the raw materials of his fallen human nature—work together to produce the dark side.

Though the pattern seems clear as presented here, much of what took place during those years was at a subconscious level. For many years Sam could not even begin to identify the process that was taking place in his life and fueling his need to succeed in ministry at all costs. Sam was simply carried along by these powerful forces, only aware of one thing: no measure of achievement was bringing the fulfillment and sense of accomplishment that he had hoped it would. The success he was craving was synonymous with and essential to receiving God's approval and finally satisfying the unmet need, which in turn would indicate that his debt had finally been paid.

This drive to succeed had at times resulted in behavior and practices as a leader that may have left many innocent and silent victims.

In fairness it needs to be stated that there are many people who have possibly been brought up in the same religious environment as Sam was and also were not able to experience the baptism in the Spirit, yet it did not affect them in the same way. We are all unique individuals, thus our dark side will be unique to us. Yet regardless of the shape our dark side eventually takes, the process will be similar once we are able to step back and identify it.

Same Pattern but Different Dark Sides

For each of us the particulars will be different, but the basic process will be essentially the same. For some it might be an

alcoholic parent or physical abuse during childhood that will need to be plugged in the model above. For others it may be a perfectionistic parent or a humiliating experience suffered at the hands of other children. Being left out of the popular social group while in high school or being turned down by the first person you ever asked out for a date may have had a tremendous impact. But whatever it is that you find yourself plugging into those categories in the chart, it has almost assuredly led to the development of your dark side. When those experiences and influences are combined with the raw materials of pride, selfishness, self-deception, and wrong motives, we can begin to see how our dark side develops into such a powerful, controlling influence in our lives and leadership.

A Good Side to the Dark Side?

Is it possible that there is any good that can come of our dark side? The encouraging answer to that question is yes! As we saw in the case of Gandhi and will see in the next chapter, our dark side can to a certain extent propel us to attempt and accomplish things we might not have otherwise attempted apart from its presence in our lives.

TARGETING INSIGHTS

- The dark side of leadership develops through a predictable pattern even though the particulars will be different for each person. With rare exception the experiences of our childhood and adolescence form our dark side.
- Though we may be only subconsciously aware of our dark side, there are signals that point to it. Such signals are observable in a drive to succeed, desire to be accepted, irrational fear, need to be in control, perfectionism, or various compulsions.

- Our dark side is inclined to be an overcompensation for needs that have not been met in our lives and develops as we attempt to repay the existential debts of varying degrees that we have taken on.

APPLYING INSIGHTS

What are the experiences from your past that formed your own dark side? How do these past experiences show up in observable ways today? In what ways do they prove to be helps and/or hindrances to your leadership?
