

DRILLING DEEP

Five Temptations Every Christian Leader Must Overcome

A Teaching from The Branch of Righteousness

Opening: The Bedrock Beneath the Surface

Every leader is tested not first by enemies, but by what is hidden beneath the surface. Consider what Jesus said at the close of the Sermon on the Mount:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Matthew 7:24–27

Two builders. Two houses. From the outside, both may have looked the same. The difference was not in what people could see above ground. The difference was beneath the surface — in what no one could see until the storm came.

This is the nature of biblical leadership. It is not performance above ground. It is formation beneath the surface. The leader who builds on sand may look impressive for a season. But the storms of ministry, pressure, and personal testing will always reveal the foundation.

Though this teaching speaks especially to leaders, these temptations face every Christian. Leadership simply multiplies the consequences, because what is unresolved in the heart of the leader eventually affects the people they lead.

In the life of every Christian leader, there are five temptations that function like layers of unstable soil — deceptively solid on the surface, but hollow underneath:

1. **Fear** — the soil of distrust
2. **Ego** — the soil of self-importance
3. **Pride** — the soil of self-sufficiency
4. **Greed** — the soil of insatiable desire
5. **Moral Compromise** — the soil of gradual surrender

Each of these must be drilled through, penetrated, and exposed — not so the leader might be shamed, but so the leader might reach the bedrock. Because biblical leadership is not about what you

build on top. It is about what you build upon.

And the bedrock is Christ Himself. Not your talent. Not your title. Not your charisma. Not your gifting. Not your public success. **Christ alone.**

Let us drill deep.

1. Fear — The Soil of Distrust

The Surface Symptom

What people see is hesitation. The leader who will not step into the assignment God has given. The one who sees the giants in the land and counsels retreat. The one who says, “We are not able.” Fear wears many faces — caution disguised as wisdom, silence disguised as patience, inaction disguised as prayerfulness.

But fear is not wisdom. Wisdom trusts God and moves forward. Fear sees the obstacle as bigger than God.

The Deeper Root

Beneath the fear is a deeper question: *Can God really be trusted?* Fear is not merely an emotional response to danger. But when fear governs our obedience, it becomes a theological position. The issue is not feeling fear; the issue is obeying fear instead of God. The fearful leader has concluded — perhaps without realising it — that God is either unable or unwilling to deliver. Fear, at its root, is a failure to believe that God is who He says He is.

The Biblical Example

In Numbers 13, Moses sends twelve leaders to spy out the land of Canaan. They return with a cluster of grapes so large it takes two men to carry it on a pole between them. The land is everything God promised. But ten of the twelve spies fix their eyes not on the fruit but on the giants:

“We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Numbers 13:33

Notice what happened. They did not just see themselves as small. They believed that was how God saw them too. Their fear was not a failure of courage. It was a failure of theology. They did not believe God was greater than the giants.

Only Joshua and Caleb saw clearly:

"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us."

Numbers 14:7–9

The difference between the ten and the two was not information. They all saw the same land, the same giants, the same fruit. The difference was what they believed about God. Joshua and Caleb knew that the Lord was with them. That was enough.

The Danger to Leadership

A leader governed by fear will never enter the fullness of what God has promised. The generation that believed the ten spies' report died in the wilderness. An entire generation missed their inheritance — not because of the giants, but because of their fear. Fear does not just paralyse the leader. It can disinherit an entire people.

The Bedrock Truth

"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

2 Timothy 1:7

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Isaiah 41:10

"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."

Proverbs 29:25

The bedrock beneath fear is **faith** — not faith in outcomes, not faith in favourable circumstances, but faith in the character of God. The leader who drills through fear discovers that the foundation was never the absence of danger. The foundation was the presence of God.

Reflection

Where have I allowed fear to masquerade as wisdom? What assignment am I avoiding because I see giants instead of God?

2. Ego — The Soil of Self-Importance

The Surface Symptom

What people see is a leader who needs to be seen. The one who must be acknowledged, celebrated, credited. The one who quietly resents when others are praised. The one who positions themselves at the head of the table — not because they belong there, but because they need to be there. Ego does not announce itself with arrogance. Often it arrives wearing the language of “calling” or “vision” or “anointing.”

But beneath the need to be seen is a heart that has not yet found its identity in Christ.

The Deeper Root

Ego says: “I need to be seen to be significant.” It is the deep belief that my worth is determined by my visibility — by how many people follow me, how many people quote me, how many people recognise my contribution. The ego-driven leader has not yet grasped that their identity was settled before the foundation of the world, in the love of the Father, not in the applause of the crowd.

The Biblical Example

In 3 John, the apostle John writes about a man named Diotrephes:

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us.”

3 John 9

Diotrephes loved to be first. That phrase — “loves to be first” — is the anatomy of ego in a single breath. Diotrephes was not just assertive. He was not just confident. He loved preeminence. He wanted the position of authority without the posture of servanthood. He even went so far as to refuse the apostle John’s teaching and to put people out of the church who welcomed others.

Ego in a leader does not just elevate the self. It excludes others. It builds walls. It defends territory. And it resists anyone who threatens its position — even if that person is sent by God.

Now contrast this with John the Baptist, who said of Jesus:

“He must become greater; I must become less.”

John 3:30

John’s disciples were worried. Everyone was going to Jesus now. John’s ministry was shrinking. But John did not see this as a threat. He saw it as the point. He knew he was not the bridegroom. He was the friend of the bridegroom, and the friend rejoices when the bridegroom’s voice is heard. John’s joy was complete — not because he was growing, but because Christ was being revealed.

And consider Jesus Himself:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Philippians 2:3–7

The Son of God — who had every right to demand preeminence — made Himself nothing. He took the nature of a servant. If Christ did not grasp for position, what leader dares to?

The Danger to Leadership

Ego makes the leader the centre of the ministry rather than Christ. It turns the church into a platform rather than a body. It breeds jealousy, comparison, and division. The ego-driven leader cannot genuinely celebrate others because every celebration of someone else feels like a diminishment of self. Over time, ego isolates the leader — surrounded by followers, but devoid of true friends and accountability.

The Bedrock Truth

Ego is insecurity seeking visibility; pride is independence resisting submission. The bedrock beneath ego is **servanthood** — the radical, joyful discovery that you do not need to be seen because you are already known by God. The servant leader is free. Free from comparison. Free from the tyranny of visibility. Free to decrease so that Christ may increase.

Reflection

When was the last time I genuinely celebrated someone else’s success without comparing it to my own? Am I building a platform for Christ, or a platform for myself?

3. Pride — The Soil of Self-Sufficiency

The Surface Symptom

Pride is subtler than ego. Ego wants to be seen. Pride believes it does not need anyone — including God. The proud leader does not seek counsel because they are convinced they already know. They do not receive correction because they have reframed correction as attack. They do not depend on grace because they have quietly come to believe their success is the result of their own strength, wisdom, or discipline.

Pride does not always look proud. Sometimes it looks like confidence. Sometimes it looks like decisiveness. But pride always reveals itself in one way: it resists submission.

The Deeper Root

Pride says: “I am sufficient.” It is the ancient sin — the very first sin — the whisper in the garden: “You will be like God.” Pride is the attempt to be self-originating, self-sustaining, self-correcting. It is the refusal to acknowledge that every breath, every gift, every opportunity, every success comes from the hand of God.

The Biblical Example

Consider Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man on earth in his day. Standing on the roof of his palace, looking out over the splendour of Babylon, he said:

“Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

Daniel 4:30

Notice the pronouns: *I, my, my*. Not one acknowledgment of God. Not one moment of gratitude. Every achievement traced back to himself. And even as the words were still on his lips, a voice came from heaven:

“Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

Daniel 4:31–32

Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind. He lived like an animal until he lifted his eyes toward heaven and acknowledged that the Most High is sovereign. His restoration came only through humility — through the shattering of his pride.

Scripture is unambiguous about the trajectory of pride:

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Proverbs 16:18

“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

James 4:6 (citing Proverbs 3:34)

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

1 Peter 5:5–6

The phrase that should stop every leader cold is this: *God opposes the proud*. Not "God is indifferent to the proud." Not "God is disappointed in the proud." God actively sets Himself against the proud. There is no more dangerous position for a leader than to be on the opposing side of God.

The Danger to Leadership

Pride blinds the leader to their own blind spots. It makes the leader unteachable — the most dangerous condition for anyone who handles the Word of God. It creates a culture where no one can speak truth to the leader, because truth-telling has been reframed as disloyalty. The proud leader may build something impressive, but it will not endure, because God Himself is opposing the structure.

The Bedrock Truth

The bedrock beneath pride is **humility** — not self-hatred, not false modesty, but the honest, joyous acknowledgment that everything I am and everything I have comes from God. Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less, and thinking of God more. The humble leader is not weak. The humble leader is the strongest, because the humble leader is aligned with the One who holds all strength.

Reflection

When was the last time I received correction with genuine gratitude? Is there an area of my life where I have stopped seeking counsel because I believe I already know enough?

4. Greed — The Soil of Insatiable Desire

The Surface Symptom

Greed rarely announces itself. It does not walk in and say, "I want more." It dresses itself in the language of "stewardship," "provision," "blessing," and "abundance." The greedy leader is not always the one caught in financial scandal. More often, it is the leader who is never satisfied — who always needs just a little more, who measures success by revenue, who quietly resents those who have more, who has made the accumulation of resources a quiet idol beneath the visible work of ministry.

Greed is not just about money. It is about the heart that always wants more — more recognition, more platform, more resources, more comfort, more control.

The Deeper Root

Greed says: “I will find my security in what I can accumulate.” It is a failure of contentment — a refusal to believe that God is enough. Beneath greed is a heart that has not found rest in the provision of the Father and so must construct its own security, its own storehouses, its own walls of self-protection.

The Biblical Example

Jesus told a parable:

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Luke 12:16–21

The rich man was not condemned for having wealth. He was condemned because his wealth had become his security, his identity, his plan. He had no room for God in his storehouses. He spoke to his soul about his grain, but never to God about his soul. His entire orientation was toward accumulation — and God called it foolishness.

Paul warned Timothy:

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

1 Timothy 6:10

Note: it is not money that is the root of evil. It is the love of money — the orientation of the heart toward accumulation rather than toward God. And note what it produces: wandering from the faith and self-inflicted grief. Greed does not enrich. It impoverishes — spiritually, relationally, and often materially too.

Jesus was plain:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Matthew 6:24

And the writer of Hebrews:

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

Hebrews 13:5

The connection is striking. Contentment is rooted not in having enough but in knowing that God will never leave. The antidote to greed is not financial discipline alone. It is the presence of God.

The Danger to Leadership

Greed compromises the leader's judgment. The leader who loves money will eventually make decisions based on financial considerations rather than spiritual ones. The greedy leader will prioritise donors over disciples, platforms over people, and resources over relationships. Greed also erodes trust — when people sense that the leader is motivated by accumulation, they withdraw. And greed blinds the leader to the needs around them, because the greedy eye is always fixed on what it does not yet have.

The Bedrock Truth

The bedrock beneath greed is **contentment** — the deep, settled rest in the provision and presence of God. Contentment is not complacency. It is not the absence of ambition. It is the freedom from being controlled by the desire for more. The contented leader is free to give, free to serve, free to steward, because their security is not in the storehouse but in the Saviour.

Reflection

If I lost everything material tomorrow, would my faith remain? Am I serving God, or am I serving what God can give me?

5. Moral Compromise — The Soil of Gradual Surrender

The Surface Symptom

Moral compromise never begins with a dramatic fall. It begins with a small adjustment — a boundary moved an inch, a standard lowered a fraction, a justification accepted quietly. The leader who compromises morally almost never sets out to do so. It happens gradually, one small surrender at a time, until the day comes when the gap between who the leader is publicly and who the leader is privately becomes a canyon.

What people see, eventually, is the collapse. The scandal. The sudden fall. But what they do not see is the long road of small compromises that led there.

The Deeper Root

Moral compromise says: “This one time. No one will know. It does not matter.” It is a failure to take holiness seriously. It is the gradual erosion of the fear of God — not the fear of punishment, but the reverent, awe-filled awareness that God is holy and that He sees. Moral compromise happens when the leader stops living in the awareness of God’s presence and begins to live only in the awareness of people’s opinions.

The Biblical Example

Consider Samson. Called by God from the womb, given supernatural strength, appointed as a judge over Israel. Samson did not lose his strength in a single moment. He lost it through a pattern of compromise — touching what was forbidden, going where he should not go, treating his calling casually. Each compromise was small. Each one seemed survivable. Until the day came when:

“She called, ‘Samson, the Philistines are upon you!’ He awoke from his sleep and thought, ‘I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.’ But he did not know that the Lord had left him.”

Judges 16:20

The most chilling words in the passage: *He did not know that the Lord had left him*. Samson had been compromising for so long that he could no longer tell the difference between God’s presence and God’s absence. He assumed the strength God had given him was still there. It was not.

Or consider Solomon — a king renowned for extraordinary wisdom. Yet even Solomon, with all his wisdom, compromised:

“As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.”

1 Kings 11:4

It did not happen suddenly. It happened gradually. One alliance, one marriage, one compromise at a time, until the wisest man in the world found his heart turned away from God. Compromise does not require stupidity. It only requires inattention.

Now contrast this with Daniel and his friends in Babylon:

“Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.”

Daniel 1:8

Daniel was in a foreign land, under foreign rule, with every reason to compromise. But he resolved — he determined, he decided in advance — not to defile himself. Daniel understood what Samson and Solomon did not: that compromise begins not with the act but with the decision to leave the door open. Daniel shut the door before the temptation arrived.

James describes the anatomy of compromise:

“Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

James 1:14–15

Compromise has a lifecycle. It begins with desire — a thought entertained, a fantasy nurtured, a justification welcomed. That desire conceives and gives birth to sin. And sin, left unrepented, grows until it produces death. Not always physical death. But the death of a marriage, a ministry, a reputation, a calling. The death of the leader's effectiveness before God.

Paul's charge is clear:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Romans 12:2

Compromise is conformity. Holiness is transformation. The leader must choose, daily, which way they will go.

The Danger to Leadership

Moral compromise does not just destroy the leader. It wounds everyone who followed them. The collateral damage of a fallen leader — the disillusioned, the scandalised, the wounded — is incalculable. A leader who compromises morally does not sin in private. No private sin remains harmless; it deforms the leader and, when exposed or acted upon, wounds the body. The higher the platform, the greater the fallout. And the restoration, while possible through God's grace, is often long and costly.

The Bedrock Truth

The bedrock beneath moral compromise is **holiness** — not perfectionism, not performance, but the set-apart life that lives in the light because it has nothing to hide. The holy leader is not a leader who never struggles. The holy leader is the one who brings every struggle into the light, who refuses to entertain the first small surrender, who resolves — like Daniel — before the temptation comes.

Reflection

Where have I begun to lower a boundary that I once held firmly? Am I living in the awareness of God's presence, or only in the awareness of people's opinions?

Closing: Until You Hit the Bedrock

We have drilled through five layers:

Temptation	The Soil	The Bedrock
Fear	Distrust in God's character	Faith
Ego	The need to be seen	Servanthood
Pride	Self-sufficiency	Humility
Greed	Insatiable desire	Contentment
Moral Compromise	Gradual surrender	Holiness

Each of these temptations is a layer of unstable soil. Each one feels solid enough to build on — until the storm comes. And the storms always come.

The leader who builds on fear will collapse when the giants appear. The leader who builds on ego will collapse when the applause fades. The leader who builds on pride will collapse when God Himself stands in opposition. The leader who builds on greed will collapse when the storehouses prove empty. The leader who builds on moral compromise will collapse under the weight of a double life.

But the leader who drills deep — who refuses to build on the surface, who is willing to be taken beneath the visible ministry into the hidden formation of the heart — that leader will hit something solid. Something immovable. Something that has been there all along.

Christ is the bedrock because He overcame every layer. He trusted the Father where fear would have ruled. He emptied Himself where ego would have grasped for recognition. He humbled Himself where pride would have demanded status. He lived free from greed, though all things belonged to Him. He was tempted in every way, yet without sin. Therefore the Christian leader does not drill down to willpower, reputation, or discipline alone, but to Christ Himself.

The bedrock is Christ. Not your anointing. Not your calling. Not your gifts. Not your experience. Not your followers. Not your reputation. **Christ.**

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 3:11

Everything else is soil. Christ is the rock.

And here is the hope: the bedrock is deeper than your failure. The bedrock is deeper than your temptation. The bedrock is deeper than your years of compromise. You do not have to be perfect to reach it. You have to be willing to drill — to go beneath the surface, to let God expose what is hidden,

to let Him strip away the false foundations until only Christ remains.

Biblical leadership is not about what you build above ground. **Biblical leadership is about drilling deep, until you hit the bedrock.**

For further study: Matthew 7:24–27; 1 Corinthians 3:10–11; 2 Timothy 1:7; Philippians 2:3–8; Proverbs 16:18; Luke 12:15–21; Romans 12:1–2; Hebrews 4:12–13; Psalm 139:23–24