Today we’re continuing our series Ultimate Leadership, and the topic today is “Leadership for Grown-Ups.” Our speaker is Dr. John Townsend. Let me tell you a little bit about John. He is a clinical psychologist. He’s the author of numerous books, including Boundaries, How People Grow, and Who’s Pushing Your Buttons? Would you please join me in welcoming Dr. John Townsend?

You know, we’ve been doing this for a while now, and the feedback is just phenomenal. The church has really appreciated what you and Henry have done in this series. I know there might be some people who are joining us today who don’t know how this series started or where it came from. Could you give us some information about that?

Actually, the whole idea of having Ultimate Leadership talks with you came from Ultimate Leadership workshop retreats that we have down in Southern California, Bill. Several times a year we’ll have a one-week intensive retreat from business leaders, to pastors, to ministry leaders, all sorts of venues who want to understand what is it about their insides that contributes to better leadership or what holds them back. So they come in for intensive groups where Henry and I teach about what the Bible says about themselves in leadership and their character and their insides, and then they go into group processes with trained facilitators and get the work done. So it’s a revitalizing time, and that’s where this comes from.

So if you are watching the broadcast today, you can still participate in these workshops in California. Is that correct?

Absolutely. They get a whole different experience, because they kind of come from here to here. They really get into what makes you tick as a person. Your values, your gifts, your issues.

Got it. I know today’s topic is “Leadership for Grown-Ups,” so can
you tell us just what we’re going to talk about?

Leadership demands certain things. You just don’t put into hats what I’m going to talk about. There’s got to be a grown-up under the hat because of what it requires of you. So we’re going to talk about what’s under the hat.

Great. Well I’m going to turn it over to you. We’ll be back in a little bit.

Hi. Glad to be here. Thank you so much for being part of our broadcast. We’re excited, Henry and I, about being with you guys, and having been for the past few months. We know that what we’ve seen in the world is that there’s a leadership vacuum—a lot of needs, a lot of people responding, and yet at the same time not enough people showing up. So we want to help train you guys so you can feel more equipped, more confident, and able to do whatever you’re called to do.

As I mentioned to Bill earlier, leadership is a hat and everybody wears hats, if they fit nice. Kind of like a nice prestige to be a leader, but if you’ve been a leader over two minutes, you probably understand that there are certain demands and requirements of being a leader. It’s hard work. I’ve got a lot of army friends, and one of my buddy army friends says, “Here’s my main rule: In the army, never volunteer.” Which, you know, you understand that. Because if you volunteer, you’ve got more work on you that’s generally not worth the work.

What is it about leadership that’s so hard? What is its demand and all that I’m going to talk to you about? To be a good leader you’ve got to be a grown-up, because it’s an adult world. You’re an adult, and you need adults around you to lead. So the more you have adult capacities the better a leader you are.

I want to start with a little story about a company that I was consulting with, where this company was having problems with their employees. I know that’s so hard to believe, but there were employee conflicts. They brought me in and they said, “We don’t know where they are, but people are not getting along. They’re not feeling like a community and a team.”

So I started doing the Sherlock Holmes thing and digging in, more like a Columbo. Asking questions. It was kind of funny, because all my questions ended up with a lady named Sally. All the problems
ended up with a lady named Sally. All roads led to Sally. So as a good detective, I interviewed Sally. I found out that Sally was a problem. I kind of started to see why people were responding the way they were responding.

Those above Sally in the authority chain in the organization . . . if you had a flow chart of the organization, those above Sally kind of thought she was a suck up. I mean, she was sort of, like, what we would call a sycophant. She tried to please the bosses all the time and was never real with them, always complimenting them when they didn’t need complimenting. When you tell somebody they look nice and they’ve been up all night, you know something is wrong. She would do that.

Now, the unhealthy bosses loved her. “Oh, she is so encouraging.” But the healthy people would go, “She’s not really real.” Then I talked to those people underneath Sally. They were miserable. She was critical with them, controlling with them, negative with them. She kind of whipped the kids. They all felt like they had this monster-in-law person who was putting them down and not letting them be themselves. I started realizing what was going wrong in how Sally related to other people. To one group, her superiors, she was a little girl who wants to please. To the other group, those below her in the chain, she was the mean parent who just wanted to beat them up.

So I talked with her, and talked with her, and talked with her, and tried to explain things. Sad to say, we had to do a Sally extraction. Guess what happened to all the employee conflicts? I know this is rocket science, but the problem went away. What happened was that Sally was unable to relate to adults as an adult. That’s what I want to talk about today . . . how you can achieve it.

Basically, the reality is leadership requires a grown-up. Let me try and define for us today what an adult or grown-up is so you’ll know what it is I want you to relate to. Here’s what an adult is: someone who has the capacity to function, get along, get the job done in adult demands. The capacity to function in adult demands. In other words, a person who is able to relate as an adult, feel as an adult, not to feel like a little kid, not to feel like somebody’s mom or dad, is able to get the job done and relate to people in a meaningful level and all those good things. That’s what a grown-up is.

Also, how do you get there? Once you’re an adult, how do you
get there? Guess what most adults were before they became adults. Again, this is not rocket science. A child. We all started up as children. In fact, in Galatians 4, Paul talks about that process. He talks about a stewardship. He says we had guardians and managers over us. We would call them parents and teachers and mentors and coaches and Sunday school teachers and neighbors. We had guardians and mentors over us even though we had the inheritance, until we had grown up to the time that we no longer needed those people around. Everybody starts out life as a child.

Now, what is a child? Well someone who is dependent, who hasn’t grown up yet, who doesn’t know the way, who needs a lot of structure, needs a lot of love and grace, a lot of guidance. But over time God’s intent for everyone of us, leadership or nonleadership, is to become an adult. Someone who has the capacity to function in adult demands. A leader who has not grown up, then, has problems.

Just kind of on the side here . . . If you have a kid and you are a leader—and you understand leadership because leadership involves leading people who sometimes don’t want to be led, which is the definition of a child—sometimes people interpret strong willed-ness in a child as leadership. They’ll say, “I’ve got a strong-willed kid. Yeah, they’re a forthcoming leader.” I have to let them down gently. I say, “I know a lot of losers that are strong-willed.” Don’t look at the fact that someone who has a strong capacity for their own decisions as always being leadership. Look for somebody who’s got good character, because good character will always set the pace for the leader that you want to be.

So the process goes, we begin where we come out of a childlike position, where we need Mom and Dad around, we need them telling us what to do. Then we begin to take these things on as these are things I can do. Psychologists call this internalization. What it means is that ultimately the child is supposed to do the functions that the parent did for him or her. A little kid falls down, hurts his or her knee, right at that age she cries and screams and says, “Where are you, Mom?” Somebody who’s thirty falls down should be able to go get a Band-Aid. There’s a difference there. They have a capacity for what we call self-soothing and a capacity to take care of yourself. These things you’re shouldering yourself as something you do for yourself.

Why is this important for leadership? Simply because of the demands of leadership. If you still feel like a little kid, there’s
no harm done because a lot of us don’t feel ready for leadership. Somebody might have invited you and said, “I want you to lead a Bible study” or “I want you to come take on this position.” “I want to bump you up to COO of the company” that you’re in. You might think, “Oh my goodness, the hat’s too big for me. What am I going to do?”

There’s nothing wrong with not feeling ready. But there’s a lot wrong with not knowing what it is that you need to develop to become that adult. These are capacities. For example, things like being able to handle stress and failure. I know a lot of leaders who are positive people and real kind of, like, energetic, and they see that when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. They’re really good with the vision and what’s ahead.

But you know what they’re kind of weak at? They’re kind of weak at a little thing called reality. Reality being the way things really are, like when there’s a failure, a stress, a screw-up. A lot of them are kind of, like, surprised by that, or it derails them, because they don’t have good capacities for dealing with the real world. They have better capacities for dealing in the ideal world. We can see that as a problem. Because every leader needs to lead people as a real person. If you look back at the great leaders of biblical times—Moses and Joshua and David—they all had their faults, but they dealt in the reality the way it was. So children develop that capacity.

Another thing that children develop is the ability to think for themselves. In the early days of being ten, twelve, eight, nine, have you ever noticed how kids are kind of a sponge for information? Why does the universe work this way? Why is the sky blue? Why do you have those funny gray hairs on your head, Dad? And all those questions? Basically they ask a lot of questions that we don’t have the answer to, but that’s not important. They’re in the questioning mode. They’re seeking information because they are in a curious mode. They don’t feel like they have enough information. They want to get it from the outside.

But if you ever had somebody thirty-five in a position like that, who’s saying, “Who should I be? Why is this this way?” you start saying, “Have you not learned anything?” Because sooner or later, as you internalize information about the world, about people, about yourself, about what you’re good at, about what you’re bad at, that information is supposed to stay there. That sponge, to use a metaphor, is supposed to stay within you to be useful to you for
those capacities.

So sooner or later, even though we’re always supposed to be growing and changing, there needs to be a center core personality that is you, who you are, what you’re good at. Every leader who has grown into an adult has started out not knowing who they were and had good people around them who said, “You seem to be good at numbers” or “English comes easy for you” or “You know, people sort of respond when you’re around” or “You really do well with problem solving with people.”

All these things, it tends to come from the outside. Children, like it says in Galatians 4, are only the inheritor. They’re not competent people yet, so the guardian or the manager is the one that tells them, “You seem to be good at this. Try this.”

I remember my dad used to tell me every time, when I was thirteen or fourteen, I’d argue with him, “Why don’t you go to law school?” I think he thought I was gifted there, but I think it was sort of an insult, but we never really had that talk. What he meant by that is that you seem to be okay verbally, and if it’s a way to get out of your capacities and a way to get out of your responsibilities, you’re very good at that. Which I’m still that way, as a matter of fact. So the point is, if you are in the leadership you had to go through a process where people saw things in you, made it safe for you, gave you transformational experiences, spent time with you, had blood and sweat and energy built into you. If that didn’t happen just the right way, you might not feel quite ready to be the leader you want to be.

Like I said, there’s no harm, no foul because there’s no such thing as a perfect leader. I don’t want anybody to ever feel they can’t make it as a leader. I want them to feel like, “Let me know what’s involved in finishing up so I can be the grown-up leader in the grown-up demands and the grown-up capacities that leadership requires for me.”

Now I want to talk about how an adult leader actually functions. There are several capacities. We’ll call them aspects of being an adult that will draw people to you, that will help you to get what the job is that you want to get done, that will exercise and draw out the best in those people. And it will also let other people see that you are a finisher and will bring a result.

Because let’s face it, a leader is really about results. The nice-guy
leader that everybody loves and looks up to but never gets it done is basically a nice guy. They’re not really a leader, but sooner or later a relationally based, loving, spiritually based leader brings some end result. Will bring X amount of dollars into the company. Will bring several people into coming to church. Will bring certain people in a Bible study to maturity. Will bring people into a church that was a church of three hundred to a church of four hundred. But you will see measurable and tangible results in a leader who knows what they’re doing.

So let’s go over the aspects, because as you know these, then you can begin to move into what it is that “I need to look at, work on, make sure I’ve got so that the hat fits me.” It’s all about, “Let me show you how good of an artist I am.” It’s all about this. That’s you; that’s the leader of today. (This should be on PowerPoint.) That’s what you want to be, a person whose hat fits this. (By the way, he’s got kind of a fat head and he’s got a skinny hat on, but don’t be a fathead. Be a regular head.)

So the first aspect is good leaders have and learn to work with a little thing called authority. A thing called authority. Every organization, every church, every business, every home Bible study with a facilitator, has an authority structure to it. Some people are afraid of that word. And it sounds like some kind of control freak, somebody cracking the whip, and it’s not like that at all. Authority is a concept designed by God.

If you look in Romans 13, for example, it says that authorities have been given and bequeathed by God for our good. All that authority means is that there is a hierarchy of who has certain roles with people so that you know where the roles are supposed to be. The leader is at the top of his or her little pyramid or big pyramid.

And . . . Was it Truman or Coolidge? I never get them right. But the president said, “The buck stops here.” That’s where the buck stops. Then everybody else has their own rules and they know that if they’re doing their job, then the whole machine—the church, the organization, the ministry group, the Bible study—moves on.

So authority is a good thing because it’s given by God and it works. Good leaders stay in that authority structure and they work in that authority structure. The reason that an adult, a grown-up, can live with authority is that they’re no longer reacting to authority. One way that you can tell about a leader who’s not finished growing
up inside, doesn’t feel like a grown-up, is that they resist the authority structure. Like, their boss says, “We’re going to change directions.” And they kind of go, “There you go again. I mean, you’re so controlling,” when probably that boss’s boss told him to change directions. He was just transferring answers. They kind of see the authority structure as their enemy.

You will find—if you’re a leader or if you have people you are trying to lead—if there are people who resist the authority structure, you’ve got real problems. Because what happens is the machine is only as good as those people understand. Now, certainly an authority structure of an organization should allow for all kinds of freedom, all kinds of challenge, people thinking for themselves, giving people a full court to dream their dreams, make their mistakes. But the buck’s got to stop somewhere. So grown-ups use the authority structure to empower others, to give them vision, to give them challenge, to give them room. At the same time, if they were to know there’s somebody that we know we need to report to . . .

There’s this great prophet . . . Bob Dylan said, “You’ve got to serve somebody.” So what that entails is that everybody has sort of got to bend the knee in some level to another person. That isn’t demeaning. I always kind of, like, never understand it when people say, “It’s so demeaning to have a boss.” Well everybody’s got a boss but God, and look what His staff looks like. His staff is pretty dysfunctional.

I never understood why having a boss was such a bad thing, because we all have somebody who can tell us what to do. Drive eighty miles down the freeway. Somebody will pull you over called a highway patrol, and you better do what he says. The next time the IRS calls you up and says, “We’d like to talk to you,” you better show up and not say, “Well nobody’s going to be my boss.” Bad things will happen to you.

The authority structure is for our benefit. Also be very, very careful in terms of authority about schisms. Schisms in a church—schisms meaning splits—could be in a church, could be in an organization, but there are people who are, like, underground people, who will sort of, like, contaminate what’s going on in the structure. They feel like they’re being revolutionary and rebellious.

There’s a lot of good revolution and rebellion in the Bible for the right things, but sometimes people have a different idea, and I’ve
seen churches split in half. I’ve seen organizations split in half by people that didn’t rebel against the values of the company. I have no problem with somebody saying to me, “I don’t like your leadership because of your values; I’m not going in that direction.” I say, “Great. There’s room for that.” But people who just don’t want authority structure, where somebody is in charge . . . they tend to divide things. So be careful of people who are anti-authority.

The second thing is that grown-ups are able to have a capacity that we call mutuality. What do you think of when you think of mutuality? You generally think of people, like, we’ve got mutual friends, for example. Somebody who has a friendship in common. One of the capacities of being a grown-up leader is that you are able to relate to an adult as an adult.

Remember Sally? She was unable to be mutual. She had to find out where she was in the pecking order, and she either sucked up to you because she wanted to get the goodies or she was kind of mean to you because she was a harsh person. She wasn’t able to be equal with people.

That’s what mutuality really means. You’ll find in good leaders—no matter what their role, no matter what their station, or whatever it would be—they are able to be respectful with every other person in their organization. That’s why I love when you see the leadership material . . . you will see CEOs that know the janitor’s name. I mean, it’s such a great capacity to be able to not live in the hat. That’s just part of you, but the person under the hat is much more important. That’s what good, adult people are supposed to do.

If, however, you had harsh taskmasters around you, sometimes it will be difficult for you to feel mutual. I know some people that, when they get called into bosses’ offices, they say, “Oh, I’m going to be fired. This is it for me.” When the boss maybe just wanted to say, “Do you want to go play golf?” That’s a person who hasn’t finished out his or her work of what being a mutual person is. But even though you’re being given a demotion, or a promotion, or you’re getting a prize, or you’re getting to the woodshed, if you still feel like you’re equal to these people, you’re a leader. You’re a good leader, and you’re able to be a mutual leader.

Here’s the other one. Good leaders have this capacity. They have a clarity. A clarity of their mission, their roles, and their gifts.
Remember, I mentioned earlier that kids don’t know who they are, and they need a parent to tell them, “Let’s draw all those things out that God’s put inside you, what you’re good at and what you love to do and what you have a passion for” and all that. An adult has clarity of where we’re going and what we’re going to do. Remember, no matter what you’re in charge of—if it’s for people in a home Bible study, if it’s a billion-dollar corporation, if it’s a little church, a big church, a mega-sized church—at any time you have to have the ability, if someone asked, to say what you are about, to say, “Here’s what we’re about.”

We’re about relationships, and we’re about bringing God to people, we’re about making the best can opener in the world, we’re about street ministry, we’re about widgets. And we get them through the following goals. A good leader is clear on those things, because you know what? All of us that are in leadership, we’re kind of, like, random. People have a lot going on in life. People have their own lives, their own dating lives, and marriages, and kids, and hobbies, and their own interests, and their own church involvements. They need the magnet. You’re the magnet for the goal and the mission. That’s what leaders do. They’re not mean or harsh or annoying about it at all. But that’s like the bee in their bonnet; they’ve always got it in their mind: What are we about?

They lay in bed at night thinking about what’s the goal, what’s the mission, and what are the ways of getting there. It doesn’t mean they give up their life, but somebody put it this way: A grown-up is concerned more about the mission than anybody else. They are the one that worries more. Hopefully not burnout level or to discouragement level, but they are more invested and care more and spend more time thinking, processing, learning, praying about whatever they’re doing than anyone else. They have the clarity.

Finally, if you look at what an authority is, fourth aspect—and this is going to sound weird but you’ll know what I mean—they have no bad differences. No bad differences. Meaning an adult has room for variety in people. Variety in styles, thought patterns, all these sorts of things. They are not threatened by somebody who wants to do something a different way.

Let me give an example. I was working with a guy who really sort of lost his position and didn’t know why until I had to do an autopsy with some people. When you’re consulting with them.
“Why did you get out of this job?”

His first thought was, “I got a bad boss.” His second thought was, “Maybe it’s not always my boss” (’cause I always say, “Let’s look beyond that”).

Found out that he was kind of a left-brain guy who’s, like, “This is the way to go. This is logical, point A to point B.” However, his new boss was Mr. Freethinking, throw it to the wall, see who . . . throw the flag to see if anybody salutes, kind of like try-anything, Mr. Right Brain, creative, and was trying to bring my friend Dave out of that a little bit, saying, “You’ve got a better brain than just your left. Do it all."

Dave was very resistant to that. You know, this is the way to do it, this is the way to do it, this is the way I’m used to doing it. What happened was he finally sabotaged himself so that his boss finally said, “I don’t think this is working; I don’t think you’re getting it.” And that’s what Dave and I had to work on, was the fact that he was unable to see that the difference between him and this guy was a good difference. He was looking at it like, “I think the right way.”

Well no, you weren’t thinking the right way, Dave. If everybody in the world was a left brain, there probably wouldn’t be a lot of art or music or things that we, like, value and cherish out there. We need right brainers for that, and we need left brainers for structural reasons, and everybody should have a little bit of both. Finally he got it that he was not resisting a value; he was resisting a preference. Grown-ups are aware that, while values are critical, you must have values of right and wrong, and who God is, and what is faithfulness and what is love and what is responsibility. Preferences are huge. You can have all kinds of preferences, and the best leaders, the most effective leaders, the most grown-up leaders, are the ones that allow tremendous room for preferences.

You know, there’s an old saying in business about the train industry. Remember . . . What was it? Late nineteenth century, twentieth century, where trains kind of ran everything? That’s how we got across back and forth and carrying everything. Then trains started struggling. Why did trains start struggling? Well because a thing called planes took over and they had different kinds of transportation. I don’t know who said it. Some analyst of kind of big leaders’ pictures in business said that if the train industry had understood that they were really in the transportation industry,
they’d be better off right now. But in their mind there’s only one way to do this and it’s in the choo-choo. And choo-choos have their place, but other things have their places now. Because they were unable to see. Broaden your horizons. Broaden your thoughts. Realize there’s no bad differences and there’s a lot of room here for other people.

So remember that’s what a grown-up is. It’s a person who uses the authority structure to their advantage and doesn’t fight it. They can be mutual with people and feel like an adult. They are clear. They are always the person who is clear on the mission. They allow for lots of differences and room.

Okay, this is great theory and this makes sense. Now let’s talk about some of the obstacles. There are a few obstacles to this. I say you could write all this stuff down, but if you aren’t able to address all the issues within you that fight this, you could put it on your refrigerator all day and it wouldn’t do you a bit of good. There are built-in obstacles that everybody has, to a minor degree or to a major degree, on being an adult as a leader. I want to work with you on this so you can be aware of where you might have some sort of an inability or not be as strong as you’d like to be and you can work on it.

The encouraging thing is these are not, like, huge issues. You don’t need to do a transformation of your entire mind. Some of these just require a little bit of information, education, and practice—and you can do very well.

So let’s look at the bad news, some of the obstacles to being a grown-up. Some of this you’re going to be familiar with because we’ve already talked about it a little bit. I am going to list three positions that are a problem, if you are an adult leader, that keep you from being the leader you want to be or are dealing with people who have these problems. So you can be . . . kind of, like, look at yourself and how you function, and also look at the people that are underneath you and above you that you are working with, because everybody has these problems.

The first is what we’ll call the child position. The child position. That is the person who is unable to see themselves as deserving the role of an adult, of being a grown-up, and especially one particular area of needing the approval of other people to make decisions. That is a child problem. You see this a lot in organizations, churches, businesses, manufacturing companies, any kind of
company. You’ll see somebody that’s got a lot of talent. You know they’re able to use their gifts; people like them, they’re smart and motivated, but they’re like a little kid inside. They are unable to take risks until somebody comes along and says, “It’s okay. You’re okay with me.”

The problem is, if left to themselves, they can’t be self-starters and people who move on out of there. They’re always sort of, like, stuck, waiting for someone else to come and give them the hat. The problem is that’s okay when you’re a kid, because we all need approval. Our ultimate approval is because of the death of Jesus; that’s how we know that we are approved. But people who haven’t had that need met and haven’t played that out, they’ll tend to kind of play it safe.

One thing I’ve learned about business and organizations is that playing it safe doesn’t really give you the growth that you want. You need to have room to make mistakes, have failures, skin your knees, do some things wrong. Like they say, sometimes it’s better to have permission than forgiveness. Well people in the child role are always kind of going and making . . . . This is not a hard question. What are they making out of their boss? They’re making a parent out of their boss, a mom out of their boss, a dad out of their boss. Then you’ll also see things like dependency needs coming out from this person, where not only are they needing approval but oodles and oodles of support. You begin to realize—and we talk about this in phases of other leadership—sometimes you’ll see people bringing family needs into the workplace.

For example, I was working with somebody that was telling me how bad their boss was, and I went to talk to them and I found out what the boss had done. And what I found out was the boss had criticized this person for sloppy work. On time but sloppy work. This person said, “Look, there it is. There’s abuse again.”

I said, “That’s not abuse. That’s, like, a good correction so you can do a better job.” At which point he said I was abusive, so that was a problem. But the result was that he needed so much affirmation from his boss . . . You could tell that he had a vacuum of affirmation inside of himself he was bringing from the home place into the workplace.

Now, again, there’s no fault and no harm in having that issue. All of us have issues, but anybody stuck in a child role . . . That feeling
like an adult, feeling like a grown-up at work, they don’t feel like they’re ready, don’t feel like they have what they need, so they always feel like a demand or a dependency on those above them.

If you want to work on that, if you found yourself in that role, we’re going to talk on some tips to help you with that. It basically involves learning how to feel safe enough to make mistakes.

If you’re an organization that doesn’t allow mistakes, that’s different. In my mind that’s a toxic organization, because any good organization should have enough grace for failure, because nobody grows without failure. But be aware of the child position.

Now, here’s the second one. I’m going to go down these in order of developmental chronology for leadership. After you have a child, those of you who are parents know, that once you have a child—you know, the dependent, needy, kind of clingy, wants to be around you—then it turns into a subhuman for a while, and that’s called an adolescent. I am the parent of two adolescents right now, so I’ve earned this. The adolescent position is an interesting position because what is a teenager? Well somebody you hope grows up one day.

A teenager is somebody who is stuck in a developmental crisis of being dependent and needing Mom and Dad and their nurture and support, and their money and all those good things and all those resources, but at the same time wants to be independent. Totally without them, totally on their own, and not answering to anybody, and kind of in charge and all that. And there’s this tremendous crisis going on inside every adolescent where they want to have all the dependency needs met, yet they hate being dependent. They want to be independent but they’re frightened because it’s a big world out there and part of them knows they’re not ready yet.

There’s a great book—I wish I’d thought of the title—it says, *Mom and Dad, I hate you, I never want to speak to you again; by the way can I have a ride to the mall?* That’s the problem when being an adolescent. Well guess what. When you see this in a person, what you see is an organization as a nightmare if a person is in an adolescent position.

Have you ever had somebody in your business, your group, or your organization that, every time you said anything, they thought you were controlling or authoritarian? Every time you
said let’s start the meeting or stop the meeting, let’s stop now, there you go again being controlling? I’ve had so many meetings with organizations, where with this one person, the word rule would flip him out. “Well there you go again. You’re just into rules. You’re not into relationship.” The guy will say, “No, I’m not into rules, but if we don’t stop on time, everybody eats dinner too late and some people have bad sugar glucose and they’re going to have a diabetic seizure.”

But no, not the adolescent. The adolescent always struggle with “I’ve got to have total freedom all the time. If anybody questions my freedom, they are a bad guy.” Now, I’m not bagging on the adolescent role. Every one of us goes through that. It is part of the process of internalizing God’s values, thinking for yourself, learning to be yourself, and all that. But if you’ve got somebody stuck in the adolescent position, you’ve got a problem. They are not functioning as a leader.

What happens is they will often kind of get into an, “It’s all about me” position, because adolescence is essentially self-centered. So much going on inside. They have hormones; and “Who are my friends?” and “Who am I?” They have very little time of thinking about other people. That comes later on in life. You’ve got some people—thirty, twenty-five, twenty-eight, forty—in an organization who are stuck thinking like that and can’t think of other people’s feelings and needs outside their own issues. That’s a real problem. That’s the adolescent role.

Well how do you help somebody like that? A lot of times they need to be made aware of it. You know, what I’ll tell somebody in that problem who is stuck in that position is, “You know, you think that the whole group is controlling you and being mean and ruled down, but could you construct a way to start on time, end on time, meet visions and goals, and not have some kind of structure?”

The ones that are, like, move along, and say, “This isn’t about people being mean to me, is it?” No. It’s about moving along. Guess what. They will do what is hard for an adolescent to do, but what will help them the most, they begin to submit. Not submit like a slave does. Submit like the New Testament says, and that’s like a bondservant. They’ll begin to realize, you know, “Somebody asked me to get their report in on time. I need to do that.” Then you can see they’ll start relaxing, because they’ve given up the fight against all rules and they’ll begin to move along and be a part of the team.
Then there’s a final rule. This isn’t going to be a hard question. You’ve got a child, you’ve got an adolescent, and many adolescents grow up and become this. The parent position … which all parents would like to see their kids become parents because they don’t have empathy for what they put them through. In the parent role, what you have is like the micro-manager, the person who won’t let anybody go, the person who’s got to know everything at all times, kind of like the information download of all things. He drives people crazy. Healthy people crazy.

If you’ve got somebody and you’ve recruited him, trained him, and you want him to do something, what they need is room and space. They need meetings with you. They need your provision, your overseeing. But it’s overseeing. You’re not over their shoulder. To be overseeing is different than over-shoulder. What will happen is they will end up controlling people. What I’ve found is, in organizations, people who are not grown-ups are really attracted to this for a while. They can be children. They don’t have to think for themselves. They don’t have to take risks. But the organization doesn’t do well because neither person is really exercising their gifts.

But healthy people hate being with a person who’s a parent. Now, maybe you’re somewhat parental. Maybe you have a hard time trusting your people. Well use this as a principle. Give them grace until they don’t earn the trust. Let them have room and see what they’ll do. Then if you find out they need more structure because they’re failing, or they’re being irresponsible, or they’re going off task, or they’re not focusing in the way they should, then meet more with them and have more structure. But only put the amount of structure with a person that they need. Never, never overstructure someone, because the life will go out of them.

Now, does that mean some people don’t need structure? No, because I believe in the prison system. I think it’s a good thing we have prisons. Because there are people who don’t have enough impulsive … self-control to live in society. That’s why we have bars and prison guards and walls and barbed wire. It helps to have that kind of structure with certain people. But people you’re working with, if you’re in the parent role, you may need to begin letting people … you’re going to have to deal—basically as a psychologist I’ve observed this—the parents have got to deal with their own anxiety. They’re anxious about everything working right as they’re used to. They can depend on themselves, because they know themselves. So they’d rather do the job.
If you’re going to be a leader, you’ve got to deal with the anxiety of letting go and, “Oh my goodness, they’re not going to do it like I would have done. What am I going to do?” Go through it; walk through the fire. You need to do it for the sake of the organization, for the kingdom of God, for the people in your life. Let them make mistakes. If they mess up, bring in a little more structure, have a little more supervision time, bring in the parameters. But don’t do it until you find out where they get lost. Let that happen. Any good organization allows that to happen.

So kind of look at yourself and see, “Do I get stuck in a child position and want too much approval without questioning? Or do I get stuck in an adolescent position? Or do I have people around me that just can’t take rules or critiques or any kind of correction or any kind of discipline?” That’s a problem. Then look for people in the parent role who have to micro-manage, control other people, make other people into little kids.

Remember Sally at the beginning of our lesson? She was stuck between these two. She needed help. Well she didn’t want help, so she’s helping others right now in another organization, but the organization is doing better. What you don’t want is these three. You want to be an adult, and the adult is somebody who has the capacity to function in an adult world and can deal with authority, is mutual, is clear, and allows people to have differences.

Let me talk a little bit about skill building. What Henry and I like to do in this series is not only to give you the biblical format in philosophy but to let you walk out with some skills, some tools, and some tips so that you’ll know what it is, like next step wise, if you’ve identified any of these issues. Where you go from here. We don’t want you stuck in the professorial egghead position. We want you to get out there in life. Because if you’re a leader, you want to engage with people, you want to do things, and leaders tend to be highly practical anyway.

Here’s some practical tips to help you become the adult leader that we hope you were intended to be by God.

The first one has to do with your relationship with the authority structure, and it’s this: For some of you, it will be easier for you than others. Learn to challenge authority, not in a mean way, but learn to question, learn to think for yourself. It’s people who would challenge authority—and again, I don’t mean people resist the fact that there is authority, but question the people that are
in your organization—those are the people that make the most difference.

When I was in seminary, I heard a great lesson by one of the professors about a student who came to him, who said, “Tell me why I believe in inerrancy, and inerrancy being that the Bible is true.”

The professor said, “What?”

And he said, “Yeah, I like to know why I believe in inerrancy.”

This professor was a leader. He was one of those guys that lead young pastors to become mature pastors. So he was really concerned about leadership issues.

He said, “Am I hearing you right?”

“Yeah. Just give me, like, ten reasons why I believe in the Bible.”

The professor said, “What do you want to do with this information?”

The student said, “Well I want to tell my people when I’m a pastor why they should believe in the Bible.”

The professor sat down and said, “Listen to this.” He said, “It took me eleven years of study, and research, and brain damage, and sweat, and blood, and going to the original languages, and arguing with people, writing letters to people, to decide that I believe the Bible is true. ‘Cause I wanted to make sure that something of that import . . . that I put the time into that. That’s eleven long years, and I’ve come to my own conclusions and I believe that they’re true.”

By then the student’s starting to shake a little bit because he kind of sees what’s coming.

He said, “Now you’re telling me that you want me to give you a Xerox piece of paper that says my ten reasons. I don’t think so.” He said, “Why don’t I tell you some sources I went to, that you could look up and see why?” He said, “I’m not trying to be mean to you, Jim. I’m concerned about your leadership. If you don’t challenge and question these things for yourself, what kind of a passion are you going to have for what you really believe and that really matters to you and you live and die for? You’re going to
take this piece of paper and go up in your sermon one day and preach it and put it down and say, ‘Well I did that this year.’ What kind of passion are the people in your pastorate going to have listening to you kind of read what I’ve told you? It’ll probably die right there, and no one will ever be excited about the life that’s in the Bible, and the help, and the vivacity, and the information, all the cool things the Bible has to offer, and how trustworthy it is, what a rock it is, and what an anchor it is. Nobody’s going to care ’cause of this silly piece of paper. So here’s some books, here’s some resources. Have a nice eleven years.”

I thought that was a really good example of how all of us need to wrestle. You know, Jacob did it with God and became Israel. The word Israel, if you’re into the Old Testament, means wrestler, the one who wrestles with God. So learn how—if you’re kind of one of those people who are afraid of authority, who gives a lot of power to authority—learn how to begin to ask questions.

My wife is a great example of this. When I go to a doctor . . . You know how doctors are with medicine the way that it is now. The doctors give you two and a half minutes whether you need it or not because they have to have more volume to fill up what they’ve lost for the insurance system. So I just go in and get my two and a half minutes and leave. And my wife would say, “So what’d you learn?”

“Well I don’t know. I read a book in the waiting room.”

She said, “What do mean?”

I said, “What do you do?”

She said, “I come in with a list of questions, and I sit there, and he gets ready to leave, and I say, ‘What about this?’ and ‘What about this?’”

I said, “How long do you get from him?”

She said, “I get thirty, forty minutes.”

I’m, “Oh my gosh, how do you do that?”

But the doctors want to give it anyway. They’re kind of scientists. They want to give it anyway. But she says, “I want to get the information about myself.” She challenges and gets more because
she asks more. Where do you think that comes from? Look in James. You don’t have because you don’t ask. Learn how to ask. Learn how to be a person who—certainly respectfully, certainly lovingly—challenges things.

Secondly, learn to handle authority. Sorry, not authority. Handle challenge from other people. The old saying, “Good for the goose, good for the gander”? Well welcome to challenges of other people. Don’t be afraid if you’ve got some smartaleck under you who’s really smart, who says, “Why are we doing it this way?”

You know, our first impulse is to say, “Because I’m the mommy,” “Because I’m the boss,” “Because it’s my Bible study,” “Because I’m the ministry leader.” That’s kind of a dumb answer, quite frankly, rather than, “Wow, Bill, I never thought about it that way. Tell me why. What are you thinking?”

“Well seems to me…” And then you think there’s some contribution here. Now you’re allowing that person to take their place at this sitting at the table of adults. You’re welcoming that person from a subordinate position to say, “Come sit with us.” There’s room here for lots of adults. See, adults have room for adults. Parents only have room for children. If you’re threatened by challenge or you resist challenge to your own thinking and your own ideas, you’ve probably got that parent dynamic thing going on in you and it will limit your leadership. But if you say, “There’s room for a lot of smart people with really great ideas and there’s no bad ideas,” you know, go for it.

That’s why in business they always tell you always go to the marketing guy before you go to the accountant. Because the marketing guy is, “A great idea. This is wonderful. I know we’ll take the name of our organization and we’ll put it on the moon. Then everybody can see it’s on the moon and buy our product.”

Then the accountant comes in and goes, “What’s this going to cost?” And then reality hits. Welcome the challenges of other people who say, “Why don’t we try this?” and don’t be threatened or bugged or put down by what they do or say. Because it’s good for you and it’s good for them. It will expand your heart; it will expand your leadership. You will become an organization where good people think, “I can grow there. No one wants to keep me in a closet there. I can use my gift.”

Actually, what I’ve seen also is not only is it good for the people,
but it’s good for the organization. You know those organizations around today, especially in today’s economy. If you’re a business person… those people who have the bright people who are willing to think things that nobody’s ever thought before. Because it’s very, very competitive. So this is not a threat to you as a person. Look at it as a compliment that they feel strongly enough about staying with you and asking for space for their ideas. It’s a good thing about who you are.

The next one, if you are interested in growing in this area, is get your own approval needs met . . . Guess what I’m going to say. At work or at home? At home. If you find that your time’s kind of empty because leadership is tough . . . whether it’s volunteer or pay, it’s work. You find yourself kind of having to go to people to pat you on the head, say that you’re okay, that you’re good enough, that you’re smart enough. What’s the guy on Saturday Night Live say? “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, but doggone it, people like me.” If you’re needing to hear that from the people on the outside, go to other places where there’s unconditional love, where there’s grace, where there’s acceptance, where there’s not a performance base.

Because, as you know, work is a performance-oriented thing, and that’s not bad. Performance is a different animal and work is that entity, that environment. There needs to be love and respect, but there also needs to be results. So if you find that you’re not getting your approval needs met, go get those met in an environment where . . . at your home, with your spouse, whoever you’re dating, people in your support group, your Bible study, your church group—whoever, get those needs met there. And what you find is that then your tank is full, so you can function as an adult when you get to work. Let the child be dealt with outside of work. It sort of, like, grows you up from short to tall, and you come in as a mutual person ready to handle anything that goes on.

Finally, learn to encourage free submission. Free submission. Now, free submission sounds like an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp, but it’s not. Encourage people to freely jump on board with you and submit to the program. Encourage people to fully decide that they want to throw their lot in with you and be in your ministry, or your volunteer group, or your organization, or your church, or whatever. Encourage them to be part of that.

You know why? Because if people feel constrained, controlled, or guilty-fied, they will never be free. If you look at Galatians 5, it
says, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; do not go back to a yoke of slavery.” So help people understand, “If I’m going to be in this group there’s certainly rules to be held to, and they’re good rules, and they’re good for me.” Help people to see. Only do this if you feel like you can.

That’s why I love what Joshua told the people, back in the Old Testament. When they were in the Promised Land, he said, “You know, whatever you’re going to do, choose this day who you will serve. However, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Don’t ever force someone, or manipulate someone, or withdraw love from someone because they didn’t want to be in the organization or whatever. Just say, “Look, this is what we do. We want you to put yourself in with us. But you know what? We really don’t want half of you. So if you don’t like the way we do things . . .”

I can tell you, as someone who works with organizations and works with people, you’re better off with someone who might even be less qualified on a purely, purely talent level, but understands the process and doesn’t fight the structure, not as a slave but as a bondservant. That person will take you further in your goals and your organization because they understand the process, use it, like it, work it, and they’re partners with you.

So best wishes. Be an adult, be a grown-up, and you will attract grown-ups, and that’s what we all want in leadership.

Thanks so much. This is just great teaching. Want to talk about some goal resources before we end. One of the resources . . . I mentioned that you were an author of numerous books. One of your books, *Who’s Pushing Your Buttons?* . . . What a great topic. Good title. What’s it about?

It has to do with those difficult people in life. Whether it be in business, life, work, or whatever, there’s certain people that you can’t leave because you’re connected to them, but they’re kind of hard to deal with. So it talks about strategies for changing yourself and the other person so that they learn that learning how to be a cooperative person is a better way to go. It’s kind of a self-help book about the other person that needs help.