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Book Notes -- David Mays, ACMC

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OVERCOMING THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP
The Paradox of Personal Dysfunction
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Easy to read. Not deep, but practical. Describes several real-life examples from ministry, the secular world, and Scripture. Each chapter has a practical self-assessment tool to help apply the insights gained.

“Few things during the decade of the eighties tainted the world’s view of Christianity as severely as the failure of several high-profile Christian leaders.” 213

“The majority of tragically fallen Christian leaders during the past ten to fifteen years have been Baby Boomers who felt driven to achieve and succeed in an increasingly competitive and demanding church environment. Most often their ambition has been a subtle and dangerous combination of their own dysfunctional personal needs and a certain measure of altruistic desire to expand the kingdom of God. However, because ambition is easily disguised in Christian circles and couched in spiritual language, the dysfunctions that drive Christian leaders often go undetected and unchallenged until it is too late.” 14

“The dark side refers to our the inner urges, compulsions, motivations and dysfunctions that drive us toward success or undermine our accomplishments.” 29 They are shadows of the factors that contribute to our success. 22

“This denial and repression along with the resulting emotion explosion are particularly common among religious leaders who feel the constant need to be in control of their lives so they can minister to others.” 23

“A person who must always have the answer usually does not listen very well.” 28

Characteristics (fallen tendencies) that underlie the dark side are pride, selfishness, self-deception and wrong motives. 40 ff.

Signs of the shadows include a vague sense of ambition, a profound or desperate need to be approved, an irrational fear that our work is not adequate, a need to feel in absolute control of every circumstance and event, or any behavior that seems to overpower us or any urge or motivation that seems to uncontrollably drive us. 51

“...when we experience some traumatic event during our childhood or developmental years that causes us to feel permanently threatened in one of these essentials areas..., 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.” 56

“Our dark side can also serve as a silent internal mentor, tirelessly coaching us to triumph in the same areas of our lives that helped create it.” 65

“The dark side can spawn good or bad, joy or pain, potential or problems. The negative aspect of the dark side rises to the surface when we use it selfishly to only fulfill our own needs and wants. We can use our dark side to serve God’s purposes in our life rather than only our unmet needs.” 81

Five manifestations of the dark side are described – compulsive, narcissistic, paranoid, codependent, and passive-aggressive. Each one is followed by a personal inventory quiz to help assess the degree to which the reader may be affected by this characteristic.

“*Compulsive* in a leadership context describes the need to maintain absolute order. ...the leader sees the organization as another area of his life that must be controlled.” “The compulsive leader pursues perfection to an extreme...” They often become workaholics. They are often overly moralistic, conscientious, and judgmental both of themselves and others. 87-88

“For the *narcissistic* leader..., the world revolves on the axis of self, and all other people and issues closely orbit them as they get caught in the strong gravitational pull...” “In spite of their drive to achieve greatness, their restless ambition is rarely satisfied in a way that enables them to enjoy their accomplishments.” They tend to exploit and take advantage of others for their own self-aggrandizement. 98

Paranoid leaders are suspicious, hostile, fearful, and jealous. They are hypersensitive to the actions of others, attach subjective meaning to motives, and create rigid structures for control. 110

Codependency is not a single category of personality disorder but is a generic trait found in many different personality types. It is “an emotional, psychological, and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual’s prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules – rules that prevent the open expression of feeling as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems.” 120

“Codependents take personal responsibility for the actions and emotions of others, often blaming themselves for others’ inappropriate behavior. They will go to just about any length to avoid hurting a person’s feelings...” 121-2

“Codependent leaders are peacemakers who cover up problems, rather than face them, in an effort to balance the group system. They may be very benevolent with a high tolerance for deviant behavior. Willing to take on more work so they do not have to tell anyone no, they react rather than act.” 124 “As a result codependents become repositories of repressed anger and frustration.” 122

Passive-aggressive leaders are stubborn, forgetful, and intentionally inefficient. They tend to complain, resist demands, procrastinate, and dawdle as a means of controlling their

environment and those around them. On occasion they will exert control through the use of short outbursts of sadness or anger.” 132

Overcoming the Dark Side

“The great majority of conflicts in leadership are the result of the leader’s own sensibilities being offended, his ideas being rejected, his being out-performed by a staff member or not receiving the attention and respect he feels he deserves, and various other petty issues. These often become areas of conflict because they touch some raw nerve within the leader’s dark side. They reinforce the leader’s feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, paranoia, or some other feeling.” 144

“...our dark side is not intrinsically evil. It is simply a part of being human.” “However, it is essential at some point that our dark side be redeemed to more adequately serve God’s purposes and to be used less in satisfying our own needs.” 147-8

Step 1. Acknowledge Your Dark Side. 152

“Denial is a deadly disease from which every serious leader should be inoculated.”
“...God’s power is most evident in us when we acknowledge our weaknesses and find our strength in his all-sufficient grace.” 156

Step 2. Examine the Past. Begin with periods of serious and often painful reflection about our past, not for placing blame but for self-understanding. “...avail ourselves of the probing, revealing ministry of the Holy Spirit, who can lead us into all truth, truth we would just as soon keep covered.” 161-2

It’s a simple process of remembering, recalling events that stand out in our memory, which have shaped us and left their mark. These events are often innocent in nature. We can recall them honestly, reflect on them, understand them, and thereby overcome their influence on us. “Reflecting on experience is a means of having a Socratic dialogue with yourself, asking the right questions at the right times, in order to discover the truth of yourself and your life. What really happened? Why did it happen? What did it do to me? What did it mean to me?” 162-4

“Forgiveness is necessary to avoid entrapment by Satan. ...unforgiveness is the number one avenue Satan uses to gain entrance to believers’ lives.” (quoting Neil Anderson. The author recommends the “Twelve Steps to Forgiveness” in *Victory over the Darkness*, by Neil Anderson) 166-7

Step 3. Resist the Poison of Expectations. 170 “...expectations can either propel people to achieve or they can produce pain and failure.” 174 “...the weight of expectations can cause even the most compliant and well-intentioned person to snap under the heavy load.” “Unrealistic expectations are intensified because of their cumulative effect.” 177-8

“If anyone understood the pressure of unrealistic expectations, it was Jesus. He entered a leadership environment where [extra-Biblical] expectations were the order of the day.” 183

Step 4. Practice Progressive Self-Knowledge. Devote time to personal spiritual disciplines. “How easy it is to forget what kind of person we really are when we neglect the mirror of Scripture.” 190-1

Take a periodic personal retreat for at least 24 hours with maximum privacy and solitude to reflect on our own spiritual condition. See *How to Conduct a Spiritual Life Retreat* by Norman Shawchuck, Reuben Job, and Robert Doherty (The Upper Room, 1986). Read the writings of Christian leaders, telling how God has worked in and through their lives. 190-192

Keep a journal to clarify Who I am, What I am doing and why, How I feel about my life and world, What ways I am growing or changing. It helps us be honest with ourselves and provides a therapy to identify inner urges and compulsions. Putting them on paper reduces their power over us to some degree. 193

Use personality profiles and tests. List and information on p. 195 and Appendix A.

Get in an accountability group. There are three levels of openness to accountability, level one – not objecting to advice, level two – wanting advice, level three – seeking advice. Go to level three. The group should be seasoned, spiritually growing people who love you and have your best interests at heart. Appendix B shows an accountability group covenant. 199

Take advantage of formal performance evaluations. 200

Step 5. Understand Your Identity in Christ. Our greatest source of worth comes from the knowledge that we are known by God and declared righteous in Christ. Our worth results from our position in Christ rather than our condition on earth. 205-6

“When we choose to live in ignorance of our dark side and resist all attempts to understand ourselves, our spiritual adversary is able to keep us in bondage through a continuous flow of lies and deception.” 209

App. A. Personality Profiles

App. B. Accountability Group Covenant

App. C. Sample Personal Constitution

App. D. Sample Performance Evaluation