

# Leadership Letter

## *What are you learning?*

I find the end of the year is always a good time for me to reflect. With the weather being so beautiful here in the south of Spain, it has been a joy to sit outside in the sunshine and think back over this last year. It has definitely been a full year and so there have been many experiences to draw from. Here are some of the lessons that I have learned and am continuing to learn – a work in progress. Perhaps you too can take a couple of hours to reflect on your year and identify what you can bring into this new year of 2012. Take a deep breath for the following 21 elements of growth.

- 1. Take the time to make memories.** In January we took Joseph, our youngest son, to London for his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. After breaking his collarbone on his previous birthday when he was snowboarding on Whistler Mountain in Canada, we knew we needed to do something special to counteract the bad experience. What a wonderful time it was. It may have cost a little extra but we created a memory that will last a very long time.
- 2. Do something outside your comfort zone.** My wife, Rite, was running a wives retreat and I offered to serve in the kitchen. Now some of you have a lot of experience at this. I don't. However it was great fun and I managed not to burn anything or poison anyone. It gave me new appreciation for how long things take and the care and time that goes into bringing those positive sounds of oooh, mmm, tasty and of course lots of smiles at the table!
- 3. Don't transition out of leadership, enlarge it.** We had our first meeting of the Barnabas network – a group of senior leaders in Western Europe for whom we are creating a platform in order for them to continue to share their influence and wisdom. The problem with transitioning out of a role is that you can become isolated and can feel like you have been put on the shelf. However, if we enlarge the leadership, we can create elder type roles, or team leadership roles. Instead of a one-man at the top, we can form a team<sup>3</sup> or 4 or 5. In a team you can rotate the principal leader, like the geese rotate at the head of the V-formation. Shared leadership makes sense.
- 4. Pioneering alone is tough.** At our European leaders forum, we talked around the theme of pioneering and partnering. What an encouragement it is when others add their strength and resource to what you are doing. We would never have been able to establish the retreat centre here in Spain without the partnering of others and the forming of team. The heavy loads are shared, the joys are doubled and the stress is minimised.
- 5. Saying “no” can save your life.** I have travelled for about a third of the year since I took on national leadership back in 1984. Looking back, it was tough on the family at times but God gave grace and they continued to release me to travel. Since seeking to establish the retreat centre, grace for travel and separation as a couple has begun to run out and so I have cut back on trips wherever possible. That has been difficult. But having said “No” many times this year, we now see the benefit in establishing a pace of life that we can maintain. We want to stay in ministry for the long haul and so need to make some clear hard choices at times.

- 6. Breakthroughs can be made by simply asking good questions.** In April we ran another coaching seminar and were reminded of the power of good question asking. It has been a learning curve to not share opinions that I am so used to doing and to simply ask questions. However, developing the skill of stimulating others thinking with questions has been a wonderful journey and how fulfilling it is to see breakthroughs in peoples lives and see them thinking new thoughts and finding solutions they didn't think were possible!
- 7. Creating community is costly.** In April and May we ran another 6 week Leadership development course (creating a community of over 60) that followed straight after the staff training week, that was straight after the coaching week that was.... You get the picture! One thing after another, one group after another. I think we now understand why there aren't many retreat centres with a very relational feel about them. One of the costs of building community is the lack of privacy. We have had hundreds of people living with us over this year as well as our church meeting here on Sundays for the past 6 months. We can almost count on one hand how many days we have had alone. However God has called us to this ministry and we are willing and count it a privilege to pay that price to see people blessed and having encounters with the Lord.
- 8. Faith sometimes involves waiting longer than we imagined.** The church that we were involved in starting some years ago had to move out of the villa we were renting for a meeting place, as it was being sold. With nowhere else to go, the church moved into our retreat centre to meet each Sunday – supposedly for a few weeks. We were negotiating for a property but it seemed to be taking longer than expected. Then it all fell through. We had been praying and believing and yet we didn't see the provision. We pressed in with faith and said, "Lord there must be something better." Sure enough there was. We have just moved into a beautiful corner facility in a shopping complex that is highly visible and very accessible. We had to wait patiently and it was a stretch for us, running programmes in our retreat centre around the church but grace was there and we have benefitted from our walls being soaked in prayer and worship over these months.
- 9. Working with the two hands of practical and spiritual ministry is challenging.** It's one thing to be thinking spiritually while doing something practical. It's another to flip between cooking and praying for people, cleaning and speaking to the group, organising and mentoring. During retreats we have found the juggling of roles difficult at times and see the need of focused personnel, especially in the kitchen domain. We will continue to work hard in recruiting a full time cook. Anyone out there?
- 10. Maintain a loose hold on possessions.** If you have ever lived in community you have probably gone through this test. We need to make a commitment with everything we make available to the community - "we give our possessions with open hands." The kitchen is no longer Rite's personal domain. The piano isn't mine! The books, the garden, the vehicles, the pool, even the dog isn't just ours anymore. Things get broken, the vehicles get scratches and scrapes, things are put back in different places and that's ok. But unless you make that commitment it could drive you crazy.
- 11. I'm not responsible for making or keeping people happy.** Mr. Responsible is my second name. I have always had it. I don't ask for it, it just appears. This lesson seems to be continuing this year, as I can't say that I have fully conquered it yet. However the

revelation came during a coaching appointment where I was asked, "Do you feel responsible to make others happy?" It was a clarifying question to me after having talked around the topic for a while. I had to say "yes." I began to write some prayers to speak out every morning, in order to help move me away from this trap. Of course I can't be responsible to make others happy! I can listen, make resources available and pray but people's happiness doesn't depend on me. I am not responsible for this!

**12. You are what you eat.** With a focus of spirit, soul and body, we have had revelation with regards to living a healthy lifestyle. Let me summarise a few of the changes that we have made in our lifestyle. We have moved away from all processed food and now focus more on raw vegetables. We read labels on food packaging in order to buy products with as few chemicals as possible. We have stopped using a microwave having read studies showing the great reduction of the nutrients in food that take place through their use. We have cut out artificial sweeteners and use as little refined sugar as possible. We certainly do feel a lot healthier. I will be writing some more on this topic in a later letter.

**13. Take time to build team.** We have had some great teams working with LDC's and other courses and seminars. The danger is always to take those teams for granted. In debrief times it came to my attention how I had been poor with personal one to ones on those teams. I was focused on putting out fires and dealing with the issues for the wider community and making sure the ministry was flowing well but in so doing had missed input on my greatest asset – my team. A good team gives grace for a while but not for long!

**14. Watch out for when a conversation turns crucial.** Having read the book "Crucial conversations", I was very impressed with the simple model shared. I am beginning to make the most of the opportunities that come when stakes are high, opinions vary and emotions run strong. It's easy to create your own stories, make judgements, get angry and upset and destroy relationship rather than build, dialogue, help to bring understanding and actually go deeper through the challenging circumstance or experience.

**15. Take care when confronting a friend or work colleague.** These are very crucial conversations. It is easy to close off your spirit and create a distance, especially when you don't agree with their position or attitude. Don't fall into the trap of withholding trust and loyalty but don't back off either. Ideally encourage a third party to be involved when possible so you don't run the risk of losing the friendship.

**16. Stay strategic or die.** We need visionary strategic thinkers to be at the forefront of our ministries to keep them moving forward and doing new things in new ways. It became very clear through the 3 week strategic leadership course that we ran in November, that we need to be recruiting, releasing, making room for, mentoring, and stimulating all the vision we can in our cities in Western Europe. There is such a need and so few workers. Where are you apostolic leaders?

**17. Facing your failures.** We all have our areas don't we? Mine is language. I have struggled in studying Spanish and have worked at various courses without much success. However, rather than give up, I have been challenged once more to press in and ask God for help, time, motivation and grace to keep going.

- 18. Give yourself to acts of kindness and compassion.** In December I had the privilege of being a part of a team that built a home for a Mexican family in Tijuana. It was only a day and yet the impact on the family was so deep. The team and I that worked together had our hearts deeply touched. I gave 6 hours of my time, such a meagre offering and yet it changed this family's whole life. I am motivated to do more.
- 19. Saying goodbye with a happy heart.** Our youngest son left for Canada in October after having been with us since last December. It was a great year of being entertained by him but also having many meaningful conversations. He matured before our eyes during those months. However he needed to move on, to find a job and establish himself. He chose Calgary in Canada and is doing well. We need to release people into their life and potential whether they are family, team members or staff. We want the very best for them, which may mean leaving us.
- 20. We only have the influence and authority we're given.** I realise afresh this year that in relationship with my family, team and leaders that are under my care, I can ask questions, share opinions and appeal to them from my heart, but that's it. If I try to use my authority and come out with "because I am your Dad, or I am the one you report to," I have lost it. If I'm living out of my own values and advice, it's more likely that others who see me in action, will receive what I say. All my influence is gone as soon as I fail to live up to my own values. The eyes of the world saw this in action last year as Tiger Woods went through his moral failure. Lord keep us living a life of integrity.
- 21. Small is beautiful.** You probably know the answer to the question – How do you eat an elephant? Of course it's, "one bite at a time." So how do we change? One step at a time. We so often spread ourselves too thin. We think of all the things we would like to change and end up doing none at all. Focusing on the "one thing" is so important. After some years of focusing on many *one things*, we can look back and see that so much has taken place. We can easily get pushed into the numbers game – to be successful we need more and bigger and better. Jesus stuck to 12 disciples and wasn't tempted to take on 25. We are focusing on smaller retreats to make the most of relationships and go deeper with people. Less can be more. More productive, fruitful and fulfilling.

Have a great grace filled 2012,

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