



EQUIPPING LEADER MINISTRIES  
CATCHING THE NEXT WAVE OF MINISTRY

# BUILDING BLOCK I

I D E N T I T Y



**Module One: It All Starts with Identity**

Module Two: Influence in the Church

Module Three: Spiritual Authority -

The Best Way to Influence

## Logistics: Schedule (Training Time: 55 minutes), Handouts, Questions

### *Slide: Introduction:*

- Did you belong to a group in high school? If so, what group did you belong to? Athletes? Drama? Chess? Band? Latin Club? Potheads?
- What did you have to do to stay “in” that group?
- How did identifying with that group positively or negatively impact your behavior?

## TEACH

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### *Slide: What is Identity?*

Identity is the deepest core of our understanding and belief about who we are, and our existence. It impacts our thoughts, values, character, and behavior.

Our identity affects how we influence, because it governs how we see ourselves and the filter we use to see others. (Remember how the people we identified with in high school impacted behavior as well as how we treated others?)

Jesus understood this and provided clear behavioral guidelines for those who wield Kingdom influence. In fact, his call to a counter-intuitive use of influence is based entirely upon his own identity. He models this approach to influence.

Jesus described his expectation for influence: “Jesus called them together and said, *‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...’*”  
Mark 10:42-43

As a follower of Jesus, we assume he really did know the best way to lead. So we assume that his instruction on leadership reflects the best way to lead. And doesn’t it follow that if we engage in the best approach to leadership, it will usher us and those we influence into the best expression of our own lives?

### *Slide: Identity Chart*

Jesus understood that our approach to influence depends on WHO we are – that deepest expression of ourselves, our identity. Sometimes, it is helpful to break down Jesus’ approach to influence down and chart it.

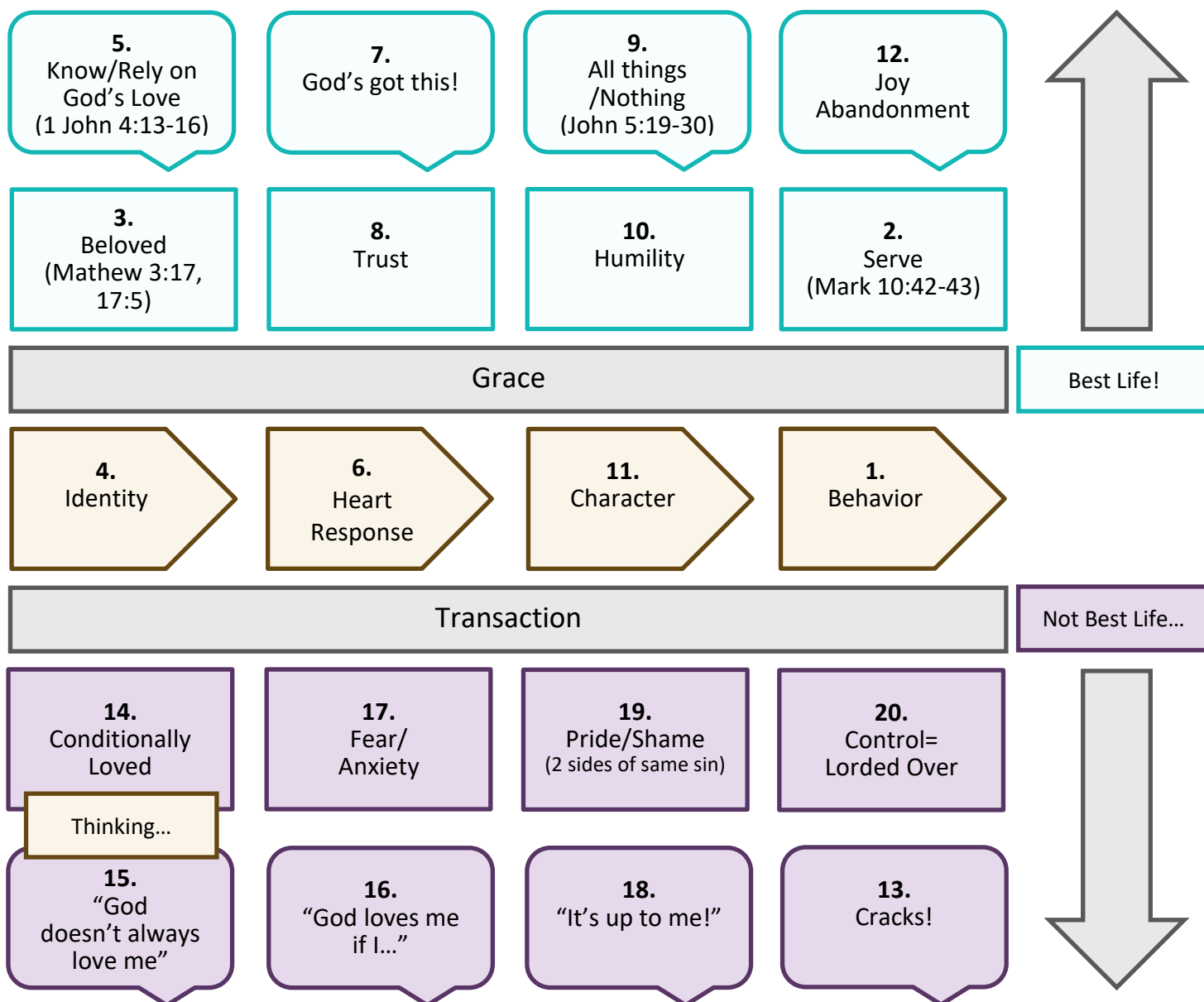
*Show Identity Chart and explain in numbered order. (Participants fill in blank worksheet chart in numbered order.) For a short overview of this chart, see the Module 1 Identity video on the Equipping Leaders Ministry YouTube Channel at <https://youtu.be/LDSZ6rZ8xis>.*

The shapes in this chart carry meaning:

- The arrows indicate progression from one aspect to the next.
- The squares contain principles that are outgrowths of the progression.
- The oblongs are “thought bubbles,” which demonstrate how our thoughts form around the principles.

# IDENTITY CHART

**Note:** How to use this chart. While this chart looks linear, it is actually a mosaic picture of the power of identity. Notice the numbers inside each box refer to the order the information appears. “It All Starts with Identity” PowerPoint correlates with the click number listed in the explanation. In other words, with “Click 1,” the word “Behavior” will emerge. In this teaching guide (following the overview of the graph), there is an explanation of what a facilitator might say with each word appearance. Also, when you see three dots at the end of an explanation, it indicates that the narrative automatically flows into the next click.



- Click 1:** “**Behavior**” – Jesus gives specific instruction about the best way to influence others. Because he always prescribes the healthiest way to live, we can safely know that this behavior is also the healthiest expression of influence, both for those who influence and those who are influenced. This is the path to healthy leadership, especially among God’s people. Jesus teaches and models for us how to live the best life. This is a core principle at ELM.
- Click 2:** “**Serve!**” – Jesus makes it clear that the healthiest form of influence is service. (Again, Mark 10:42-43.) This approach to influence is counter-intuitive, and yet, Jesus was unapologetic in his teaching. It is how he led, and he did so with abandonment, expectation, and joy. The commitment to service flowed from of a deep understanding of influence, one that is not incorporated in many leadership circles. What was this insight? What compelled him to not only recommend a servant posture, but model it with great abandonment and joy as well?
- Click 3:** “**Beloved**” –Jesus was sure of his core identity. He was God’s beloved son. The Father made this clear. There are two mentions of God’s voice being audible in the New Testament. And both times, God the Father says the same thing. *“This is my son, whom I love.”* (Assuming that if God said something aloud for all to hear, it is important, it is obvious that he loved his son.) Jesus understood that. If we read Jesus’ words about the Father, especially in John, it’s clear that there was a deep and intimate connection between him and his Father. In fact, it appears his whole existence revolved around that relationship and the love he experienced from the Father. If we were to grab a phrase out of one of John’s other writings, we could say that Jesus knew and relied on God’s love (and opened the door for us to do the same). Check out 1 John 4:13-16!
- Click 4:** “**Identity**” – This was his most foundational and fundamental definition of who he was at his core. So, in every situation, he was aware that he could...
- Click 5:** “**Know/Rely on God’s love**” – When Jesus found himself in a moment of challenge, because he was confident in the Father’s love, his first thought was “I know the Father’s love and I can rely on it.” This nurtured his...
- Click 6:** “**Heart Response**” – Because his identity was anchored in this love, and because he knew and could rely on God’s love, out of his heart flowed the confidence...
- Click 7:** “**God’s got this!**” – When challenged, or suffering, or grieving, or joyful, or doubtful, or seeking, he could declare: God’s got this! This phrase, this thought progression, is a simple declaration of...
- Click 8:** “**Trust**” – Jesus explicitly trusted the Father. He arranged his whole life around this reality. Each moment of Jesus’ life becomes an expression of obedience to and love for the Father which reveals uninhibited trust. It was such a deep part of his experience, that he said...
- Click 9:** “**All things/Nothing**” – *“By myself I can do nothing...”* John 5:30. He also lives a life that demonstrates what would inspire Paul to say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” This radical reliance on God and absolute dependency is often used as the definition of...

**Click 10:** “**Humility**” – This is the distinguishing characteristic of the “suffering servant.” Isaiah emphasized this as the heart of the humble King. Humility is a mark of Jesus’...

**Click 11:** “**Character**” – Humility was the foundational building block of Jesus’ character. Humility is the character trait out of which the behavior of service flows. It is why he can say that the defining behavior of Christian influence is service. Because of depth of character, Jesus’ service was more than a duty, it was lived out with...

**Click 12:** “**Joy and Abandonment**” – This demonstrates a disposition of humble service that is a place of deep existential satisfaction. It all flows out of a profound understanding of identity as God’s beloved child. The invitation for those who follow Christ is to experience this kind of life as well, starting with the recognition that they are a “beloved child of God!” Yet, if we are honest, we all experience ministry...

**Click 13:** “**Cracks**” – “Cracks” are behaviors that demonstrate ways in which our influence becomes unhealthy for those we lead and even for ourselves. This is true in Christian circles as well. From your experience, what are some illustrations of that?

In my interactions, I’ve bumped into all kinds of cracks. Beyond the ones you mentioned, here are others (see list below). Of course, the question is, where do they come from? They flow from a sense that we are...

**Click 14:** “**Conditionally Loved**” – It starts in that place where we aren’t sure that God really loves us as much as we hope he does. Or, flows from a place in which we don’t believe that God is good enough to love us. This usually flows from a question of our adequacy or the quality of God’s love. That is,

- “I’m not good enough to be loved,”
- “God is not good enough or powerful enough to hold me.”
- That this love must be earned or flows out of a system of merit.
- It flows from a misunderstanding of the nature of ministry – that effectiveness (fruitfulness) depends on us.

This leads to a nagging thought...

**Click 15:** “**God doesn’t always love me**” – We place conditions on God’s love, usually dependent on personal behavior. Perhaps the more accurate statement is, “The depth of God’s love for me is dependent upon my performance.” God’s love becomes something we earn rather than freely experience. Then “cracks” appear in our reliance on God’s love.

**Click 16:** “**God loves me if**” – We begin to identify the conditions necessary for us to experience God’s love. These conditions are difficult to identify because they don’t exist. In trying to set these conditions, we are trying to do something we have no ability to do, especially if we tie these conditions to performance. We may perceive that we are conditionally loved when things are not flowing the way we desire. Such as:

- When others criticize or question us.
- When we have experienced great hurt.
- When life turns in a way we hadn’t envisioned
- When others question our integrity.

These and a myriad of other experiences can engender...

**Click 17:** “**Fear and Anxiety**” – We find that we are scrambling, over our head, losing ground or simply in distress. Our inclination is to escape, fight, or freeze, and if we are unsure of God’s love for us. We think...

**Click 18:** “**It’s up to me.**” – Even unconsciously, we begin to depend upon ourselves. If the definition of humility is absolute dependence, then this is the opposite.

**Click 19:** “**Pride/Shame**” – It is pride, which claims, “This is about me and I’ll manage it.” Or shame, which claims, “This is about me, but I can’t manage it, so I’ll give up on it.” Either way, it becomes about “me.” And either way, by taking charge or by giving up, it is about...

**Click 20:** “**Control**” – Which is just another form of saying, “Lord over.” We may not be tyrannical, but we are controlling. Every ministry “crack” is, in one way or another, about control. It is certainly our...

**Click 21:** “**Not Best Life**” – And Jesus teaches us that this is not the pattern of those who want to experience the best life. “Lording it over” or “seizing control” results in ministry cracks and undermines the life of the Kingdom.

**Click 22:** “**Best Life**” – As exemplified by Jesus is one full of joy and abandonment to effective service and abundant life. It flows out of a life of service, fueled by humility and trust, and buried in the reality of being beloved.

**Click 23:** “**Transaction**” – The not-best life is marked by transactional interactions and we pay the price. Those we influence pay the price. When our interactions with God become transactional, our interactions with others become transactional.

**Click 24:** “**Grace**” – The best life is marked by grace, generosity and gratitude which is freely given to all we serve, whether they respond to our influence or not. It is also an “in the flesh” representation of God’s love and grace for those who may need a concrete example of God’s love and grace...

**Note:** *There is a need to think about the difference between faithfulness and control. When does responding in faithful, diligent service end and power-grabbing begin?*

### *Slide: Anxiety-Fueled Identity*

We live below the line of grace when we are anxious or fearful about God's ability to love us or care for us. We begin to behave as though we are conditionally loved (especially by God). This causes "ministry cracks."

Our fear and anxiety breed either shame or pride. We grasp for control, even if that control takes the form of "giving up." This "grasping" influences behavior that undermines God's work in our lives as well as those we influence. These behaviors are called "ministry cracks."

For example, to depend upon positional leadership to motivate people to respond to your leadership is a "ministry crack."

Watch out for fear! *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."* 1 John 4:18

We can usually trace our sin, self-preservation actions and dysfunction directly to fear. Shame, guilt, and anxiousness are signals that we are afraid, and/or that "our ministry is threatened." You will never be able to love perfectly until you are convinced that you are perfectly loved!

This is why it is so important for a Christian leader to do the hard work of processing his/her identity. The moment your identity comes from something less than God's great love for you (and that love lived out practically through humble service) your ministry will develop "cracks."

### *Slide: Anxiety-Fueled Identity (cont.)*

Here is a list of "ministry cracks." Discuss which ones are most common among Christian leaders. Are there any missing "cracks?"

**Note:** *In my experience it is ministry that is marked by:*

- *temper*
- *passive-aggressive tactics*
- *manipulation*
- *coercion*
- *"hard sell"*
- *position*
- *work-aholism ("you can rest in heaven!")*
- *misaligned priorities*
- *fear-based decisions*
- *self-comforting behaviors*
- *procrastination*
- *people-pleasing actions*
- *controlling tendencies*
- *difficulty celebrating*

Ministry built on anything, but a Christ-centered identity will burn up like chaff in the fire of Christ's all-consuming glory. No matter how philanthropic it appears to others, it is built on self-serving attitudes. (Even benevolent actions can be self-serving, and among Christian leaders, often are.) It eventually comes to a point of "lording it over them" (for example, "I'll focus on this person as long as they are generous," or, "I'm the pastor and so I know what's best").

"Lording it over" is another word for controlling people.

I cannot equip unless I am willing and able to give up control. Will I order ministry around the truth that Jesus knows how to build his church better than I do? Am I willing to rely on the fact that he has prepared

his saints for good works? It is not my job to force compliance. I equip them to discern and obey. Jesus will take care of the rest.

**Note:** Sometime in this discussion, you may become aware that some in the room may have experienced trauma from a leader who has responded to them in a “below-the-line” manner. If so, take time to listen. Acknowledge their hurt. Pray for their healing. You may want to circle back around with that person and help them healthily process their hurt.

### **Slide: Our Primary Identity: Dearly Loved Children!**

When every thought, value and behavior is anchored in the reality that we have a Heavenly Father who loves us dearly, it frees us to live our best life, and wield influence in the healthiest way possible. This is living above-the-line...

When we live above the line, we recognize that our number one privilege and responsibility is to create for ourselves and others environments in which we all know and rely on God’s love together.

- Our identity as God’s beloved children releases us to influence using **spiritual authority**. (See Module 3.) Jesus modeled this in his teaching in John 5.
- It is only through **trusting** (without reservation) that God is caring for us and for those we influence that we can experience joyful abandonment in our service to Christ.
- **Forgiveness** is one expression of living above-the-line. We cannot freely forgive others apart from an identity that fully embraces a reality that we are God’s beloved child.

**Note:** Forgiveness is the ultimate act of humility and service. A humble “I forgive you” lets another person off the hook for the hurt they have caused and serves the relationship by making it right again. Interestingly, the other person may not even know they are on the hook. Often, the real damage being done by unforgiveness is to the unforgiving one.

*Forgiveness also frees us from the damage done by leaders who have utilized “below-the-line” leadership approaches with us. When we forgive, we break a cycle of hurt that can undermine our ability to recognize the depth of God’s love. While “hurt people hurt people,” people who have forgiven those who have hurt them are freed to experience God’s love.*

We should never back away from putting ourselves in a place where we can more deeply experience the love of the Father. However, often that means embracing self-sacrifice and hardship.

- What other practices allow us to express our reality as a beloved child?

**Note:** Sabbath is one way to nurture an experiential knowledge and practical reliance on God’s love. (It is an antidote to many controlling tendencies. **It includes a focus on relationships, renewal, and rest.**)



### ***Slide: A Quick Observation***

“When God acted in Jesus the Messiah, he not only revealed himself fully; he revealed fully what genuine human life was like – and it turns out to be deeply self-sacrificial. Simply following the desires of the physical body, and equally of the mind will lead you to ruin.” (N.T. Wright, *The Prison Letters*, p. 19)

I would add leadership to Wright’s quote, i.e., “He revealed fully what genuine Christ-like leadership was – and it turns out to be deeply self-sacrificial.”

In summary, the antidote to fear is: 1) to experience God’s love, and 2) to express self-sacrificing love.

### ***Slide: Reflection***

#### Insights

- Which “ministry cracks” do you struggle with?

#### Application (“Reflection”)

- When was the last time you felt beloved by God?
- What were the circumstances around that moment?
- How can you order your life in such a way that you can build more of that kind of experience into your life?

#### Support Needed—Who can help you?

- What is the most important insight for growth from these reflections?
- How can you apply this insight to your life? What is your very first step to integrating the insight into your lifestyle or work?
- Who can help you by providing resources, encouragement, and accountability?

## SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES

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*“When teaching that he is the Bread of Life, and that his disciples must eat his body and drink his blood. He met pushback, On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, ‘Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.’ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” John 6:60-64, 66*

*“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.” Mark 10:42*

*“...he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”  
Philippians 2:6-8*

*“And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:17*

*“While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” Matthew 17:5*

*“This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.”  
1 John 4:13-16*

*Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.” John 5:19-21*

*“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” John 10:17-18*

*“Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.” John 8:54*

*“...apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5*

*“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13*

*“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” 1 John 4:18*

## CASE STUDY...

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This is the resignation letter from a pastor of a congregation that is highly regarded in many church circles. As you read it, what are the “ministry cracks” this leader confesses?

Link to [following letter](#)...

Dear Willow Wheaton family,

What I'm about to share is likely to feel sudden and likely to shock you. And it's very difficult news for me to share. I will be departing as Lead Pastor at Willow Wheaton effective on August 11, 2019. I love you all deeply, and that has made this decision incredibly painful. I know this may come as a surprise to you, and so let me explain.

I want you to know that I have loved this congregation more than any ministry assignment God has given me. I've seen more of God's activity, His grace, His power, and His presence in the past eight years through this congregation than any other time in my ministry. We have seen lives change together, and I have built lifelong relationships that have been a gift to me and my family.

In January, I preached a message to you from a passage in John 15 and then 2-weeks ago Megan Marshman spoke from that same passage. Each time I was in this text, the Holy Spirit has convicted me about the intensity through which I seek results. I have too often associated my identity in the fruit of my labor (results), rather than resting in the truth that I am God's child - which is enough. This drive has led me to being intense, passionate, and results-driven - sometimes to a fault. As a consequence, I have developed a blind spot in my leadership that has impacted some of the Willow Wheaton staff in my pursuit to move us forward as a church. This is not who I want to be or how I want people to feel. Intentions aside, I realize that I should be leading with the fruits of the spirit more than I have. Recently, that feedback from staff has become a growing concern for Willow leadership.

Therefore, I have been in a process for the past 6-months with Steve Gillen and the broader Willow South Barrington leadership around this issue in my leadership style. We have also involved outside executive coaching to help decipher and reveal these blind spots for me. The process has been very intense and, to be honest, hard to process at times. After much reflection and discussion, I'm going to be stepping aside as Lead Pastor of Willow Wheaton. Willow has been very generous in caring for my family financially as I step away from my role here. That being said, I am still uncertain what is next for me. I would appreciate your prayers as our family seeks God and discerns our next chapter.

I look forward to an opportunity on August 11<sup>th</sup> to take some time to personally say goodbye. I know that God is at work in this church! And I believe that He has much good for Willow Wheaton to accomplish in the months & years ahead. It's really hard to let go of my church home and workplace, as Willow has truly been a foundational piece of my life. But I trust God's sovereignty!

Thank you so much for allowing me to serve this wonderful place with all of you. I love you.

Grace + Peace,

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If you would like to pay it forward again, you can at [www.equippingleader.com/give](http://www.equippingleader.com/give).*