The Spiritually Healthy Leader

The hook was set early in Dave Wiedis' book *The Spiritually Healthy Leader: Finding Freedom From Self-Sabotage* with this potent statement: *But deep spiritual transformation in the lives of others is severely jeopardized without the personal transformation of the leader's own heart. And it certainly does not take place if the leader is sabotaged by the idols of his heart. Ministry leaders don't usually implode from outside pressures but rather, the seeds of their destruction are already planted in their hearts, and they are incapacitated from within.*

Sadly, it is an all-too-common refrain—leaders who are no longer in the game because their lives were dominated by something other than the supremacy of Christ.

I found this book to be eye-opening and convicting. And an invitation to taking a serious personal inventory. I trust you will accept the invitation as well. Our world is desperate for leaders who stand strong and go the distance.

Here are the Book Notes that will provide a fly-over to what's in store.

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Lead With Your Life

The Spiritually Healthy Leader: *Finding Freedom From Self-Sabotage*

Author: Dave Wiedis

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Book Description:

Most ministry leaders don't usually implode from outside pressures, but rather, they are most often incapacitated from their own inner struggles. Dave Wiedis, the Founder of ServingLeaders Ministries, helps pastors, counselors, and teachers uncover what is functionally most important to them, understand how these core commitments, or "ruling passions," can hijack their lives, marriages, and ministries, and gently guides them to grow in their passion for God.

The Spiritually Healthy Leader exposes these root causes and offers the path to deep life transformation, freedom in Christ, and deliverance from self-sabotage. With Christ as the true center of their lives, ministry leaders can walk vibrantly with God, free from self-sabotage of the heart, and experience the ripple effect of health and healing in their lives, and see that effect positively impact our close relationships, families, churches, and the next generation.

Book Quotes:

But deep spiritual transformation in the lives of others is severely jeopardized without the personal transformation of the leader's own heart. And it certainly does not take place if the leader is sabotaged by the idols of his heart. Ministry leaders don't usually implode from outside pressures but rather, the seeds of their destruction are already planted in their hearts, and they are incapacitated from within. LOCATION: 222

In over three decades of experience as an attorney and in pastoral counseling, I have often worked with incredibly talented pastors who are admired for their godly character, dynamic leadership, and inspiring biblical sermons. Their congregations are impressed with their gifts, preaching, and powerful impact. Yet some of these same gifted leaders have destroyed their ministries and marriages through landmines of relational failure, financial impropriety, sexual immorality, narcissism, dictatorial leadership, or more subtle idols, illicitly fulfilling their longings for affirmation, admiration, control, or adventure. LOCATION: 227

The premise of this book is that we are designed by God to be driven by a "ruling passion" to live wholeheartedly coram Deo, before the face of God. As will be further defined in chapter 1, a ruling passion is an extraordinarily strong desire that rules or controls us such that we make achieving that goal an ultimate priority. LOCATION: 247

Ministry leaders must recognize the universal truth that anyone is vulnerable to self-sabotage when impure, self-protective heart commitments are adopted. The degree to which we are unaware of our ruling passions is the degree to which we will engage in idolatry of the heart. LOCATION: 270

This book is an invitation to submit your entire being—including your passions—to the transforming work of God so that you will live every aspect of life in complete love for, in obedience to, and under the supremacy of Christ. It is an invitation to live coram Deo, before the face of God, so that your passions are transformed and your ruling desire will be to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). LOCATION: 276

The principles in this book are not only for spiritual leaders, but they are also for all who desire to live in Christ. Every person in your church is governed by and will act in conformity with their ruling passions and may be potentially sabotaged by them. As a shepherd you have the special responsibility to lead and disciple them so that their hearts are yielded to the lordship of Christ. As you learn to identify your ruling passions, engage in the process of repentance, and experience deep heart transformation, you will be better equipped to powerfully minister to and shepherd the hearts of those in your church and ministry. LOCATION: 283

The spiritual health, wholeness, and "excellency" of our soul can be measured by who or what we love, where we spend our time and energy, what we dwell on, and what we most passionately pursue with all our might. LOCATION: 325

Our spiritual health can be measured by what we most prioritize—by what we are most committed to…We may claim to be primarily passionate about God, but our moment-by-moment actions often reveal otherwise. LOCATION: 333-343

What are you most passionate about? How large is the disparity between what you claim to be most passionate about and what you are most passionate about in practice? LOCATION: 363

The degree to which we are unconscious of our ultimate commitments is the degree to which they can control us and undermine our ministries. The premise of this book is that our spiritual health is measured by the object of our love which, in turn, is revealed by our ruling passions. LOCATION: 368

A ruling passion is an extraordinarily strong desire that rules or controls us such that our energy is given over to pursuing and achieving this goal. LOCATION: 373

You can tell a lot about people by how they fight or handle conflict. Our conflicts reveal our character (or lack thereof), what we are passionate about, and the ultimate commitments that control our lives. In marriage counseling, how couples argue, attack each other, and defend themselves is often more revealing than what they are fighting about. LOCATION: 402

Each time he denied Christ, Peter was motivated by fear and his ruling passion for self-protection. In other words, at that moment, his fear and self-protective behavior trumped his love for and commitment to Jesus. LOCATION: 555

Ruling passions, like other weaknesses, can lie unseen and dormant, but like an unseen landmine, they can explode at unexpected times. LOCATION: 566

Ruling passions can lie dormant over time and become activated in periods of stress, anxiety, weakness, and vulnerability. When we are particularly susceptible, they can rise and sabotage our relationships or callings. Although your ruling passions may be out of your awareness and lying dormant, you have them. With God's help, you can discover them and be transformed so that you rule the passions that want to rule you. LOCATION: 589

We have defined a ruling passion as an extraordinarily strong desire that controls us such that our energy is given over to pursuing this goal above all other things. LOCATION: 629

Galileo is attributed to have said that "passion is the genesis of genius." And yet, if our passions become ultimate pursuits and priorities in our lives and replace God, they can become functional idols of our hearts. Timothy Keller has defined idolatry in a very helpful way: Anything can be an idol, and everything has been an idol. . . . [An idol is] anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. . . . An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure." LOCATION: 640

However, Keller reflects, sin isn't only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry. LOCATION: 650

The operating principle, then, is that I can take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing, thus making it an idol in my life. LOCATION: 654

Ruling passions are core motivations of the heart that have their genesis in experiences and take the form of vows. I'm not referring to formal vows one might take in becoming a priest or admission into a formal organization, but rather expressions of the heart—decisions to live a certain way. For example, "I'll never trust anyone with my heart" is an internal vow that will deeply affect the person making that vow and everyone in a relationship with them. LOCATION: 696

Our vows reveal longings that reside deep in our souls. These longings point to the way God has wired us to worship and find satisfaction in him. But without the proper awareness that our longings point to God, the desire to fulfill them can be the seedbed for idolatry. LOCATION: 739

Don't underestimate the power of our vows; they have a profound effect on how we live and can set the trajectory of our lives. LOCATION: 748

Just as the bottom of a murky lake is hidden from view, our longings and motivations can be hidden from us. Likewise, our ruling passions can be very subtle and often lie below the surface of our awareness. This is why

it is possible to go through one's entire life without a clear understanding of what they are or how they operate. LOCATION: 824

If what is below the waterline represents our hearts, and as Jesus said, the heart drives us, then we must seek to understand that our behavior is a direct manifestation of the condition of our hearts. We must be willing to take a close look at the motivations of our hearts, even when they are hidden and hard to accept. Developing an awareness of our answers to questions like "What do I long for?" "What's really going on inside me?" and "What's my motivation?" is vitally necessary if we are going to discover our ruling passions and allow God to transform us so that we become free of their control. LOCATION: 867

First, try to identify a vow or commitment that you have made that still affects the way you live your life today. A more extensive list of examples of vows can be found in chapter 3, but here are a few common vows: "I will never be hurt," "I will never be embarrassed," "I'll always be the strong one," "I will always be in control," "I will always be affirmed."…Second, identify the situation or experience out of which that vow arose. Vows are made because of either painful or pleasurable experiences. What happened in your past to make this vow so important in your life? LOCATION: 907-913

Loving and serving God with our whole hearts means that we will make his will and priorities for our lives our will and priorities, and that we will say yes to him even when it is uncomfortable, dangerous, or when we want to say no. It also means laying down our lives for him. Sometimes it means literally dying for him. More often, in our culture, it means subordinating our own desires, preferences, longings, and ultimate commitments to God and his will for us. LOCATION: 1022

Unless we are fully submitted to and under the control of God, we will be under the control of something else. Conscious or unconscious vows turn into ruling passions that can easily control us. LOCATION: 1044

The gospel is a transformative experience that ignites in our hearts a love for God designed to supersede all other loves. LOCATION: 1304

Given the supremacy of Christ over all things, he becomes the preeminent, ultimate passion of my life. With Jesus established as my ultimate priority, I will embrace his priorities, his teachings, his ways, and his will. My driving motivation is, as Jesus summed up the entire Law and the Prophets, to love God with all my heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:34–40). Loving God and others—and all that entails—is the ultimate ruling passion and glorifies God. LOCATION: 1308

Lord, I give you full access to my heart and open it up to you. The desire of my heart is for the supremacy of Christ to be my ruling passion so that every area of my life is subject to you and under your lordship. I long to live in full obedience to your heart, will, and ways. I pray that my ruling passions for finding affirmation, significance, and identity apart from you will yield to seeking your pleasure and to doing all that you have called me to in both the big issues of life as well as the mundane. LOCATION: 1327

If our longings are rightly ordered, our ruling passion for the supremacy of Christ and intimacy with Jesus will help us prioritize the lordship of Christ in every area of our lives as Paul reveals in Colossians 1:16–20…The result will be a heartfelt attitude that can be expressed like this: "I'll be whoever God calls me to be, and I'll do whatever God calls me to do, even if my longings are not fulfilled." LOCATION: 1429-1433

When my longings are not rightly ordered, it may appear that I live by the supremacy of Christ, and I may claim that Christ is my priority, but in truth, my ultimate commitment will be to satisfy my ruling passions. They may be legitimate longings for things like affirmation, impact, success, significance, control, and comfort, but they will be pursued and prioritized over and above obedience to Christ. Then, my obedience will be conditional. Essentially, I will even end up using God to fulfill my own agenda. The result is an attitude expressed like this:

“I’ll do whatever God calls me to do, only if my longings are fulfilled.” LOCATION: 1460

By the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, Paul had repented and reoriented his ruling passion for righteousness toward the person of Jesus. He was now fully motivated by his desire to know Christ and to live in a way that accomplished God’s purposes. His sinful ruling passion for pursuing righteousness through the law was completely transformed and properly reordered into his new ruling passion: the supremacy of Christ. LOCATION: 1557

First, it is imperative that we prayerfully embark on the process of repentance and transformation in God’s presence, relying on his grace and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to help change us gently, accurately, and skillfully. In other words, treat this transformation process as what it must be: a grace-filled transaction with the living God who loves us and is able to change us from the inside out. LOCATION: 1664

When we see ourselves through the grace-filled eyes of Jesus, it frees us to be honest with ourselves, God, and others. A fundamental hallmark of a Christian is that he or she loves the truth, wherever the truth leads. LOCATION: 1685

A biblical response to our ruling passions requires thinking deeply about and having an accurate assessment of the heart motivations that drive us—even when that assessment is painful. Prayerful self-reflection is vital because we cannot repent of motives and behaviors of which we are unaware. LOCATION: 1694

As you prepare to identify and repent of your ruling passions, be mindful that Satan will feed you lies—twisting God’s truth about your identity, skewing your ideas of what is most important in life, and leading you away from the bedrock reality of God’s absolute and unconditional love for you. LOCATION: 1791

It’s easier to deny our issues than to go “below the waterline,” where we must explore and feel our pain, fears, crushed longings, and disappointments and examine the motives of our hearts. LOCATION: 1846

When we indulge our ruling passions, we are using them as an excuse to stay stuck in sinful patterns of behavior. LOCATION: 1864

The most insidious response to our ruling passions is to protect them. Some guard their ruling passions as if they were untouchable treasures rather than cancer to be rooted out. LOCATION: 1880

By way of overview, here are the steps we will cover: 1. Identify and Confess Our Ruling Passions (chapter 13) 2. Ask God to Redeem Our Ruling Passions (chapter 14) 3. Process Emotions in a Godly and Healthy Way (chapter 15) 4. Let Christ Be Our Strength (chapter 16) 5. Walk in the Truth (chapter 17)
LOCATION: 1909

We simply can’t ignore our wounds; we must remember and attend to them, appropriately grieve, and undergo a significant healing process. Here is a profound, life-changing truth: You can’t change your past, but you can be a godly steward of your past and use your wounds as an opportunity for ministry. Others have similarly noted that you can’t change the beginning, but you have the responsibility to get a good ending. In other words, the past is always open to reinterpretation and can be formed and reformed in light of biblical truth and the redemptive character of God. LOCATION: 2010

To go forward, we must go back to address formative experiences that are the seedbed for our ruling passions and wisely steward our past. LOCATION: 2019

This is the acid test of allowing God to redeem our past. Are we willing to use our memories of painful events and—when it is wise and appropriate—reexpose ourselves to the same situations where we were hurt so that

our experiences might prove redemptive to those around us? LOCATION: 2124

An essential part of the healing and redemptive process is to address our emotions in a godly, healthy way. LOCATION: 2174

The Bible contains intensely emotional language and is filled with examples of people being honest about their emotions, ranging from worshipful joy to the depths of despair and darkness. Denying that we have emotions does great harm to ourselves and misrepresents the teaching of Scripture. LOCATION: 2230

There are two components to processing your painful experiences in a godly, healthy way. First, allow yourself to process your past painful wounds emotionally and compassionately by allowing yourself to feel those emotions that you have suppressed, denied, or have not fully acknowledged. Second, as explained in chapter 17, process your past painful wounds rationally through a biblical worldview to gain an understanding of God's perspective and purposes in your specific circumstances. LOCATION: 2267

When we medicate our pain with sinful, addictive behaviors, we then necessarily "split" and engage in "image management," where we present an external image (or false self) on the outside while hiding the reality of our condition on the inside. LOCATION: 2308

In contrast to masking and medicating, a godly, honest, and healthy approach focuses on experiencing our emotions in a safe, empathetic environment and inviting Christ to be with us at the center of our experience, even in our deepest pain and disappointment. LOCATION: 2317

As you allow yourself to feel your emotions, invite Christ to be with you in your pain…Prayerfully express what you are feeling and thinking and invite Jesus to be with you, to comfort you, and to sustain you. LOCATION: 2403

The degree to which you are not in touch with the motivations and longings of your heart is the degree to which your behavior will feel more compulsive and over which you have no control. LOCATION: 2424

The fourth step in addressing our ruling passions is to embrace our weaknesses and revel in the radical biblical truth that when we are weak, Christ is strong in us (2 Corinthians 12:8–10). This is counterintuitive and countercultural, turning our natural tendency to emphasize our strengths upside down. LOCATION: 2544

Transformation involves renewing our minds, and an essential element of this renewal is knowing and walking in the truth. The fundamental question we must ask ourselves is whether what we believe (about anything and everything) is true or false. The process of transformation begins by asking this question specifically about our interpretations of our experiences and the beliefs we carry and then comparing them to both biblical truth and general revelation. LOCATION: 2634

One of the most challenging and yet profound and liberating truths I have heard is this: "You have the exact past God wants (or allowed) you to have. You can't change your past, but you can be a good steward of your past and use it for his glory!" God is sovereign; he was and is in control of all things. Nothing happens apart from his divine plan. Nothing happens by accident. And God can take our tragedies, pain, hurts, losses, and even abuse and redeem them for his glory. LOCATION: 2683

A modern example of someone who has viewed traumatic events in her life through the lens of God's sovereignty is Joni Eareckson Tada, who was tragically paralyzed after a diving accident. Joni echoed this biblical concept saying, "God will permit what he hates to accomplish that which he loves." This truth provided Joni with assurance that God despises suffering. Jesus spent much of his time relieving people of suffering, but because we live in a fallen world, God allows his people to suffer to "accomplish what he loves."

LOCATION: 2741

Personal Worksheet: Finding Your Ruling Passions. Use the questions and illustration below as a step-by-step guide to help you find your ruling passions and create your personal narrative.
• What shaping experiences or circumstances were significant in my life?
• What was my emotional response to those experiences?
• What beliefs about my world or myself did I form or adopt because of my experiences?
• What vows did I make because of my beliefs?
• How do I relate to others as a result of my vows?
• What behaviors do I engage in as I relate to other people to fulfill my vows?
• How do others perceive me based on my behaviors and the way I relate to them?
• How do the ways others perceive and treat me reinforce my beliefs about my world or myself?
• Are these beliefs true and biblical, or are they false? Why?
• If my beliefs are false, what is the truth?
• Am I looking at myself and my beliefs through a biblical lens?
• What would God say to me about the false beliefs I have about myself and others?
• What does true transformation look like?
• Can I see my story—even my pain and suffering—through the lens of God's providential hand in my life?
• How could I be a good steward of my past and use it to glorify God and love others?
• How would my life change as I am transformed into the image of Christ? Be specific.
LOCATION: 2939

The degree to which we are not aware of our motivations is the degree to which we can be dangerous to others. LOCATION: 3294

As a loving mentor, Paul knew of risks to Timothy, and I know of risks to all of us who desire our ruling passion to be Jesus. No one is immune from self-sabotage. Many forces compete for our heart's affection; many passions want to rule us. To redeem our passions, we must be surrendered to the lordship of Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. We must live as Jesus lived. We may pursue many passions, but Jesus must be our main passion. LOCATION: 3382

The only way for you to redeem your passions is to be curious, honest, humble, and open about the desires of your heart with yourself, your close community, and Jesus, with complete surrender and confidence in the power and passion of Jesus. It was Jesus who perfectly surrendered himself to the Father's will, desiring what the Father desires in perfect and complete alignment. It was Jesus whose ruling passion for his Father's will and glory, for the joy set before him, endured the cross to bring you, with your passions and desires, back to life in him for his glory! LOCATION: 3397

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.