

“Becoming a More Differentiated Leader”  
Outline and notes

“Give me courage to resist, patience to endure, constancy to persevere”—Thomas á Kempis

Let nothing disturb you,  
Nothing frighten you;  
All things are passing;  
God never changes;  
*Patient endurance attains all things;*  
*Whoever possesses God is wanting in nothing.*  
God alone suffices.

—Teresa of Ávila

Fusion, Cutoff, and Anxiety:

Bowen said that everyone exists on a spectrum of emotional fusion with others, or emotional cutoff from them.

If you're fused, you're looking for a sense of self from the people around you.

If you're cutoff, you're pushing away from others to try and find that sense of self.

Bowen said that everyone is doing this, all the time. Everyone exists on a spectrum of fusion and cutoff.

And that both fusion with others or cutoff from others is a sign of a person's emotional immaturity.

They're both reactive responses to our lack of self. That lack of self makes us anxious.

“I don't know who I am when I'm with you, and I don't know who I am when I'm away from you.”

Fusion says, “I don't know who I am, so let me be close to you, or this group, and you will tell me who I am, and if I'm good or bad.”

When a leader is anxious they will either fuse with their people or cutoff from those people.

Differentiation: A third way

Differentiated leadership is about being engaged with yourself, being engaged with others, knowing the difference between the two, and leading out of yourself toward the higher principles that guide your organization.

A leader who is growing in differentiation is  
Connected (to God, Self, and Others)  
Curious  
Calm  
Consistently Principled

What is Differentiation of Self?

“Differentiation is the ability to be fully yourself while being fully connected to people. It is gaining clarity on where “I” end and the “other” begins.”—Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*

“Differentiation is not about being coercive, manipulative, reactive, pursuing, or invasive; it is about being rooted in the leader’s own sense of self rather than focused on his or her followers”—Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*

Why Differentiation of Self?

- 1) No one has the wherewithal to go back to a leadership book and flip through to the right answer to a problem during highly anxious situations.
- 2) Leadership problems tend to be either technical or adaptive.
  - a. Technical challenges are those that your organization already has the resources to tackle. We need a bible study? No problem. We can buy a book, or have someone write a curriculum.
  - b. Adaptive challenges are those where your organization doesn’t have the resources to tackle and you can’t just go out and buy them. We need people to lead the study, but no one will step up.

Adaptive challenges require differentiated leadership because you have to navigate the anxiety of getting others to change, disappointing them when things don’t go the way they wanted, and living in the uncertainty of how things will turn out.

A differentiated leader:

Talks to problem people instead of about problem people

Let’s people make decisions for themselves, even when they know they’re not good decisions. And stays engaged with that person, even as it hurts.

When they see problems in their ministry they begin by asking, What part am I playing in this?

Allows themselves to be alone when they need to be alone, and to be close when closeness is called for.

Is connected to people, but doesn’t do for others what others can do for themselves.

Knows their limits and lives within the limits of their personhood.

Evaluates personal praise and critique through the lens of the Kingdom and Jesus' goals, rather than through immediate success or failure.

Is emotionally engaged, but instead of reacting to people or situations operates according to biblical principles of wisdom.

Embraces the full scope of their emotional life—anger, sadness, joy, grief, lament—without having to do those emotions to other people. They can be angry and not sin.

Example of Ted Lasso. See Steve Cuss' analysis of him from his podcast.

Opening shot of Ted Lasso—In a big football stadium. Every seat is blue, but Ted sits down, and his blue seat becomes red. From that red seat where he is sitting, all the blue seats start to turn red and all the graffiti is cleaned up.

It's an image of his healthy sense of self engaging with and transforming anxious people in a powerful way, and it's a great image for the rest of the show.

The whole show is a primer in the power of differentiated leadership.

“To the extent leaders of any family or institution are willing to make a lifetime commitment to their own continual self-regulated growth, they can make any leadership theory or technique look brilliant. And conversely, to the extent they avoid that commitment, no theory or technique is likely to succeed for long.”—Edwin Friedman

“The leader who is working on differentiation will be better able to provide a steady hand to a congregation facing significant changes and adaptations to its ministry context, discerning its future, managing intermittent conflict among its members, or engaging an unexpected crisis that suddenly calls the congregation's future into question. Such leaders will offer their congregations a better chance to thrive and serve effectively during times when the culture surrounding them is anxiously spinning...These leaders will also demonstrate an ability to sustain an active, effective ministry over the course of a lifetime, avoiding burnout, blackout, or moral failure.”—Robert Creech

“(Lincoln's) mind is at once philosophical and practical. He sees all who go there, hears all they have to say, talks freely with everybody, reads whatever is written to him; but thinks and acts by himself and for himself.”— Thurlow Weed (THE political boss of NY in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century) on his initial assessment of Abraham Lincoln as a political leader.

## **How do you grow as a differentiated leader?**

Three big things that you can do to become more differentiated are:

- Work on your family of origin
- develop a prayer life
- Embrace the Wilderness

### *Work on your family of origin*

What, in God's Providence, made you the person you are today? And how are you taking the baggage that you packed when you were eight into pastoral ministry today?

Especially, how are you looking for others to give you a sense of Self that you didn't get from your family, or in what ways are you afraid that others will take away the sense of self that you should have gained in your family?

This is important because ministries are like families, which means that the place where you first learned how to do relationships in ministry was in your family.

Your sense of Self shoots a line through the family you came from, the family you're in now, and the ministry family that you run.

So if you work on your Self by going back to your first family, and staying engaged with your now family, then you'll be better able to lead your ministry family.

If you don't work through that then you're going to look for other ways to plug the leaky holes in your sense of self.

-Get a good therapist

-Do a genogram

"Many people try to handle their unresolved attachment to family through work. It is easy to try to make the church into a substitute family and to address and improve on old family issues there. It is also common to try to resolve old family or origin issues in our new family of creation. In both cases, we try to make these relationships into what our first family was not or to develop what we thought was lacking in that family."

—Ronald Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*

### *Develop a Prayer Life*

To lead you must be grounded in your self, but to be grounded in your self, you must first be grounded in God.

You have to lead yourself to a place where you can be with yourself before you can lead others and be with them.

A major part of leadership is being able to take a stand alone, and spiritual practices are a way to learn to begin to do that.

Taking time to pray or sabbath is always an act of resistance where you stand alone against the idols of your heart, our culture, and the demands clamoring for our time and

attention. When we do this, we do it because it's where we go to know who we are, and to experience the goodness of who we are in relationship to who God is.

Leaders who can take a stand do so because they have already taken these smaller stands alone. Through that they know who they are, which means that they can start to say,

“I want...I think...I feel...I believe...I wonder...I am curious...”

We get this through pursuing the means of grace—things like prayer, fasting, scripture meditation, and silence have all been shown to help us to become more principled, integrated people

Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land*:

Laird says that these things “are all patterns of stunning weather. But we are not the weather.”

He advises that those who pursue God through contemplative prayer will find a deeper sense of themselves.

“When the mind is brought to stillness we see that we are the mountain and not the changing patterns of weather appearing on the mountain”.

-Learning from the Trinity

We have one God with three persons. They are connected and together, but they never lose sight of where one begins and the other ends.

And this God is everywhere, but he never loses himself in the creation. We're not pantheists, and he lives inside of Christians. He is in us, and with us, and around us. But he is not us.

He is totally himself, and he is totally present with us at all times. God is never lost in our darkness, or the darkness of our world.

He is fully differentiated, and he is making us like himself through the means of grace.

To become like him is what we were made for, and the means of grace is the way that he's given us to do that.

“We do not seek this sort of time apart from others reactively, against others, but proactively, as a way to clarify our own thinking, beliefs, goals, values, and so forth...Solitude is about getting to know ourselves better, so we are clearer about what we have to bring to others. Solitude is a way to cultivate perspective and objectivity.”—  
Ronald Richardson

## Embrace the Wilderness

-Romans 5:1-11

We can rejoice in our sufferings because we know that they produce valuable things in us: endurance, character, and hope. All the things you're going to need if you want to lead God's people.

The Wilderness is clarifying about who we are, what we want, what we trust in, and how God provides.

-The example of Moses: Now that he's been in the Wilderness for 40 years, he is qualified to lead my people.

-The example of Jesus: "This is my Beloved Son!" Then he goes to the Wilderness to experience dependency and weakness before beginning his earthly ministry.

We need to embrace our wilderness experiences too and see them as the means by which God is developing our sense of self.

The three most important things that any leader can focus on is:

- 1) Working on their sense of self
- 2) Learning to pay attention to the right things
- 3) Building a team

— When you know where you begin and others end, you can put the right work back on the right people.