



PERSONAL LEADERSHIP IDENTITY AND THE LOVE OF GOD: INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF DAVID

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This paper argues that receiving and drawing upon the love (*hesed*) of God is integral to every Christian leader's core identity and leadership perseverance. As an exemplar from the Hebrew Bible of receiving the love of God, David demonstrates a secure attachment to God, as seen through the lens of attachment theory and forged from a young age into adulthood. An overview of the events of his life in 1 and 2 Samuel and the Davidic psalms sets the stage for an analysis of Psalm 31, chosen as a representative psalm that examines David's understanding of God's *hesed* against the backdrop of multiple leadership challenges from which he cries out to God for deliverance. This paper provides a prototype for contemporary leaders on how to draw upon the love of God by defining *hesed* and presenting sixteen leadership benefits, as derived from Psalm 31. When godly and obedient leaders are confronted with discouragement, obstacles, rejection, and opposition that threaten their leadership identity and vitality, they can, as David did, draw upon the faithfulness of God and lay claim to God's steadfast love in complete dependence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The personal identity of Christian leaders often comes under assault in the exercise of leadership. Inherent in the leadership role is the reality that leaders encounter misunderstanding, testing, criticism, and opposition. In some instances, a leader's character may be called into question, maligned, and attacked without justification. What sustains a Christian leader in the midst of such challenges? What role does one's identity as being loved by God play in keeping the Christian leader focused,

centered, secure, and not dissuaded by the leadership challenges that confront him or her?

A leader's personal identity is influenced by many factors including one's family background, level of appropriate nurture, and life experience; as well as natural abilities, talents, skills, personality, and intrinsic motivation. Increasingly, social psychologists relate the impact of early formative relationships on interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Leadership theorists have applied attachment theory in assessing the quality of early childhood experiences, which deeply impact a leader's personal identity, self-esteem, and overall sense of well-being.

In the Old Testament, the life of David provides a substantive narrative into the development of a godly leader's personal identity through ongoing crises as mediated by attachment to God. What is of particular interest is the role of the love of God, as David understood it, which sustained him through unrelenting leadership challenges. The Psalms, many of which were penned by David, provide a further window into how David processed these leadership challenges, in light of his deep sense of being loved by God.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the life of David as it relates to how his receiving the *hesed* of God impacted his personal identity. This paper addresses five primary areas. First, a brief overview of David's life and background provides the lens for this analysis. Second, by applying attachment theory, a social cognitive perspective applied to leadership formation, to David's early formative life experiences, I argue that David's secure attachment to God in early life experiences not only prepared him for his leadership role but also sustained him throughout the eventual challenges he would later confront. Third, David's perspective on the *hesed* of God provides a closer look at how David demonstrated his dependence upon the love of God throughout his leadership journey.

Fourth, an analysis of Psalm 31 provides a representative look of David drawing upon the *hesed* of God. Fifth, this paper distills sixteen leadership benefits derived from Psalm 31 related to the essentiality of receiving the love of God throughout one's leadership journey as the cornerstone of leadership identity and perseverance and offers both insights and a prototype for contemporary leaders. Therefore, the main thesis of this paper is this: David's life demonstrates that receiving the love of God in an on-going manner not only promotes a secure attachment to God, but also provides the spiritual and emotional arsenal to successfully withstand leadership trials and challenges. A brief overview of David's life establishes the context for this analysis.

II. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DAVID'S LIFE

The Biblical text in 1 Samuel 16 offers brief biographical data related to David's early life.¹ David lived with his father, Jesse, and seven older brothers in Bethlehem. When the prophet Samuel visited Jesse, in order to obey God's directive to select one of his sons as king, God overruled Samuel's initial decision to select Eliab, the oldest, and Jesse's six other sons in favor of David. As the youngest, David was a shepherd tending the family's sheep and had to be called to appear before Samuel. Further,

¹ All Scripture citations will be in the New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise stated.

David is described as being physically attractive (v. 12). Samuel anointed him in the presence of all of his brothers and “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power” (v. 13).

Because David was a harpist and regarded as a brave man and warrior (1 Sam 16:18), he was enlisted to play the harp when evil spirits taunted Saul (v. 23). Subsequently, David became one of Saul’s armor bearers (v. 21) and would go on to slay the Philistine giant, Goliath (2 Sam 17:50). Interestingly, in rehearsing his credentials for withstanding Goliath to Saul, who questioned his young age (v. 33: “you are only a boy”), David noted that he had exercised leadership in protecting his father’s sheep by killing a lion and a bear who threatened the flock (vv. 34-37).

Upon Goliath’s demise, David’s rapid rise to leadership catapulted him into national prominence. At the same time, David’s popularity prompted a severe jealousy in Saul who became intensively distrustful of David as a future competitor for his throne. In addition, God’s favor upon David brought continual success, which created a deepening fear within Saul (1 Sam 18:14). Saul’s consuming and jealous preoccupation with David as a threat and Saul’s lack of God-dependence sharply contrast with David’s secure attachment to God (vv. 8-9). The next section describes attachment theory, arguing that David’s life reflects a secure attachment to God that provided the spiritual and emotional arsenal he needed to withstand Saul’s unrelenting attacks and other leadership challenges.

III. ATTACHMENT THEORY, LEADERSHIP, AND APPLICATION TO DAVID

This paper argues that David developed a secure attachment style with God in childhood that informed his responses to leadership challenges later in adulthood. An overview of attachment theory offers the background for substantiating this assertion. *Attachment theory*, a social cognitive approach, provides one implicit leadership perspective that has received recent attention in the leadership literature. Attachment theory was first proposed by British psychologist John Bowlby to explain individual differences in how infants relate to primary caregivers (mainly parents) and regulate distress.² Bowlby asserted that to grow into adulthood in a mentally healthy way, “the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.”³ Bowlby argued that children create expectations based on the emotional availability and nurture of early caregivers. These expectations then become working models that are generalized to new relationships and provide organizing schemas for cognition, emotions, and behaviors later in life.⁴

American psychologist Mary Ainsworth and colleagues furthered Bowlby’s work by hypothesizing that children of emotionally responsive caregivers react to separation

² Bowlby was a child psychiatrist and researcher, who became director of the children’s department at the Tavistock Clinic in London. See Bowlby’s trilogy: *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 1 Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 2 Separation* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), and *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 3 Loss* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

³ John Bowlby, “Maternal Care and Mental Health,” *World Health Organization Monograph* (Serial No. 2), 13.

⁴ See Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 2 Separation*.

with less fear, anxiety, and avoidance than nonresponsive caregivers.⁵ In observing infants' styles of attachment, Ainsworth and colleagues asserted that nurturing, affective bonds provides a sense of security and worth. From this work, three primary attachment styles were identified: secure, anxious–ambivalent, and avoidant.

First, the secure attachment style is associated with a consistently nurturing caregiver in childhood. Research has demonstrated that secure children are likely develop into secure adults who perceive themselves as worthy of love, expect others to be trustworthy and responsive,⁶ and generally feel liked by coworkers.⁷ Second, the anxious–ambivalent attachment style generates from inconsistent caregiver interactions in childhood. Anxious–ambivalent adults evidence relatively low self-esteem and worry about rejection.⁸ They may overzealously hold onto others, which might precipitate further rejection. Third, the avoidant attachment style connects with a caregiver's consistent unavailability and unresponsiveness, creating a deepening insecurity for the child. Avoidant adults are seen to prefer working alone, while becoming defensively self-reliant, withdrawn, at times hostile, and expect to be rebuffed.⁹

Over the past decade, leadership theorists have called for a closer look at the developmental antecedents of leadership.¹⁰ For example, in their initial attempt to link attachment theory with leadership, Popper, Mayseless, and Castelnovo found a significant correlation between transformational leadership and a secure attachment style in three separate studies.¹¹ Regarding attachments at work, Keller and Cacioppe proposed that leaders “may approach the dependency inherent in the leader–follower relationship, similar to that of the parent–child relationship,” as consistent with their own attachment style.¹² Further, Popper and Mayseless link transformational leadership to good parenting, using the metaphor of leaders as good parents.¹³ If, as Keller and Cacioppe suggest, attachment theory helps to explain leader effectiveness, then we

⁵ Mary D. Ainsworth, Mary C. Blehar, Everett Waters, and Sally Wall, *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978). Also see Mary D. Ainsworth and John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

⁶ See Phillip R. Shaver and Cindy Hazan. “Attachment,” in *Perspectives on Close Relationships*, ed. Amy L. Weber and John H. Harvey, 110-30 (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994).

⁷ See Cindy Hazan and Phillip R. Shaver. “Romantic Love Conceptualized as an Attachment Process,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52 (1987): 511-24.

⁸ Micha Mikulincer and Orna Nachshon, “Attachment Styles and Patterns of Self-Disclosure,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61, no. 2 (1991): 321-31.

⁹ Phillip R. Shaver, “Attachment Styles and Internal Working Models,” in *Knowledge Structures in Close Relationships: A Social Psychological Approach*, ed. Garth G. O. Fletcher and Julie Fitness, 25-61 (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1996).

¹⁰ See Micha Popper, Ofra Mayseless, and Omri Castelnova, “Transformational Leadership and Attachment,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (2000): 267-89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹² Tiffany Keller and Ron Cacioppe, “Leader–Follower Attachments: Understanding Parental Images at Work,” *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 22, no. 2 (2001): 70-75.

¹³ Micha Popper and Ofra Mayseless, “Back to Basics: Applying a Parenting Perspective to Transformational Leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (2003): 41-65. Identified qualities characterizing both transformational leaders and “good” parents include: (a) providing individual attention, (b) communicating accepting messages of trust, (c) inspiring faith to set and achieve goals, (d) providing opportunities for success, (e) building others' self-worth, (f) winning trust and respect through setting personal example, and (g) developing others' potential as secure.

might do well to examine attachment theory as it is evidenced in David's life and leadership.

Outside of his being the youngest son with acumen in shepherding, we know very little about David's early childhood relationship with his parents that would inform his attachment experiences. Aside from knowing Jesse was his father who willingly released David to serve in Saul's court, we have no referent to his mother, as she is not mentioned in the Biblical text. Further, we know that David had seven older brothers, with the oldest, Eliab, resistant to David's involvement in any way in the battle with Goliath, even as an observer.¹⁴ Therefore, we might infer that David spent much time alone in early childhood based on his birth order and shepherding duties. In Israelite context, it is/was not uncommon for shepherds to be age thirteen or younger.

However, what is clear from the Biblical narrative in 1 and 2 Samuel, as well as the Psalms attributed to David, is David's connectedness to God as his primary attachment figure. I argue that David attached to God as a young boy through his experiences as a shepherd and harpist that informed his leadership attachment style in adulthood as one of being secure, rather than anxious-ambivalent or avoidant. The Psalms attributed to David provide a retrospective window into his attachment to God and his complete dependence upon God for comfort, survival, and leadership identity. Interestingly, in that self-disclosure has been linked to a secure attachment style,¹⁵ David's consistent self-disclosure in the writings of the Psalms further supports his secure attachment style to God, as they substantiate his open communication to God. The next section reviews how David drew upon the love of God and how this keen sense of the personal *hesed* of God operated in his life and informed his leadership.

IV. DAVID'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE LOVE OF GOD: *HESED*

The greatest insights into David's perspective on the personal love of God for him derive from the Davidic psalms juxtaposed with the narratives from 1 and 2 Samuel, which chronicle his leadership journey and challenges. This section provides an overview of (1) David's leadership challenges, (2) the psalms attributed to David, (3) the general purpose and composition of the psalms, and (4) the theme of *hesed* (חֶסֶד) that is interwoven throughout these Davidic psalms.

David's Leadership Challenges

From the time David fled from Saul (1 Sam 20), he became a forced fugitive in order to escape Saul's plots to destroy him. For example, as a man on the run, David's escapes ushered him to the priest of Nob (21:1-9), the king of Gath where he feigned insanity (21:10-15), the cave of Adullam (22:1-5), from place to place (23:13), the Desert of En Gedi (24:1), the Desert of Moan (25:1), the Desert of Ziph (26:2), and Gath with the Philistine king (27:2). While this civil war churned between Saul and him, David pursued national battles against the Philistines (i.e., at Keilah in 23:1-6 and against the

¹⁴ The narrative of 1 Samuel 16:8-11 indicates that David had seven brothers. However, 1 Chronicles 2:13-16 indicates that David had six brothers.

¹⁵ See Milkulincer and Nachshon, "Attachment Styles and Patterns of Self-Disclosure," 322.

Amalekites in 30:1-30). David was an emerging leader fighting two major wars: civil war with Saul and national wars with Israel's enemies. Thus, in times of crisis, David strengthened himself in the Lord his God (30:6b).

Although, as Steven L. McKenzie asserts, David was forced to respond to these unexpected pressures by developing a variety of skills that caused him to advance quickly, David's trust in the Lord developed precisely through them.¹⁶ McKenzie notes, "David's attitude toward Yahweh, in turn, is consistently depicted as one of trust and obedience."¹⁷ The Psalms are the literary outgrowth of David's personal and leadership experiences, often forged through the crucible of continual crises.

Brief Overview of the Psalms Attributed to David

McKenzie notes that seventy-three psalms, just less than one-half of the entire Psalter, are attributed to David, with fourteen psalms referencing some circumstance or situation that occurred in his life (Psalm 3, 7, 18, 30, 31, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142).¹⁸ The psalm descriptions for each of these fourteen psalms are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Fourteen psalms attributed to David with accompanying post-scripts

Psalms attributed to David	Post-script beneath each of the Psalms
Psalm 3	A psalm of David. When he [David] fled from his son Absalom.
Psalm 7	A <i>shiggaion</i> [perhaps a musical term] of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.
Psalm 18	For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.
Psalm 30	A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David.
Psalm 31	For the director of music. A psalm of David.
Psalm 34	Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.
Psalm 51	For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.
Psalm 52	For the director of music. A <i>maskil</i> of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has

¹⁶ Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

	gone to the house of Ahimelech.”
Psalm 54	. . . a <i>maskil</i> of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, “Is not David hiding among us?”
Psalm 56	. . . of David. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.
Psalm 57	. . . of David. . . . When he fled from Saul into the cave.
Psalm 60	. . . a <i>miktam</i> of David. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.
Psalm 63	A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.
Psalm 142	A <i>maskil</i> of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer.

In summary, the post-script of these fourteen psalms suggests that David authored them. They become the reservoir for exploring David’s view of the *hesed* of God. A brief understanding of the purpose of the psalms assists in our analysis of David’s understanding of his leadership identity through the typology of praise, thanksgiving, and lament.

General Purpose and Composition of the Psalms

The psalms are essentially poems written in any number of situations and circumstances reflecting the authors’ circumstances, as well as with God and others. Subsequently, the Psalms were utilized within the worshipping community, and, as such, became models of prayer and worship. According to Old Testament commentator Craig C. Broyles, the psalms are “poetic compositions, usually presented in a tightly woven, balanced structure (e.g., where the petitions echo the respective laments, the dovetailing of imagery, and poetic devices such as refrains and word plays).”¹⁹ Each of the psalms, though unique, follows certain typical literary patterns with their own motifs including: temple liturgies, hymns, individual prayers, corporate prayers, thanksgiving, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. They reflect rhythm, meter, parallelism, repeated refrains, and types.

For example, Hermann Gunkel developed a typology of five psalm types inclusive of hymns, laments of the people, laments of the individual, songs of thanksgiving of the individual, and spiritual poems.²⁰ According to Claus Westermann, the individual psalm of lament is the most common in the Psalter, accounting for fifty psalms. Psalm 31 is one such psalm and is further described in the next section as a representative psalm reflective of David’s trust in the *hesed* of God.²¹

¹⁹ Craig C. Broyles, *New International Biblical Commentary: Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 1-2.

²⁰ For a brief introduction to Gunkel’s work, see Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms*, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967). Also see ²¹ Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

²¹ Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

Certain psalms were utilized in corporate worship services, others during specific worship times such as the Passover. And through the Psalms, Israel drew upon God's covenantal promises in expressing joy and sorrow, certainty and confusion, and victory and desperation. Although Broyles resists pigeonholing the psalms for any one purpose, he submits that they are useful for liturgy, literature, Davidic prayer, and prophecy.²² Most of the Davidic psalms appear in the first two books of the Psalter (Pss 3-72). Applying the psalms to a more contemporary context is addressed later in this paper.

Although a thorough examination regarding the nature of the psalms is beyond the scope of this paper, general characteristics are offered in order to assist to place the Davidic psalms in greater context. Old Testament Scholar Claus Westermann proposes that laments for the individual psalms are comprised of a progression including: (1) an address to God (i.e., a cry for help); (2) a lament related to God, oneself, or one's foes; (3) a confession of trust; (4) a petition for God to act favorably or to intervene; (5) an expression of assurance that the petition has been heard; (6) a double wish that God would intervene against something/someone for a favorable outcome; (7) a vow of praise; and (8) praise to God expressing an assurance that the petition will be answered. Each of these elements is observed in Psalm 31, the focus of greater analysis later in this paper. Further, Brueggemann's interpretation of the Psalms provides a balanced approach, suggesting that the Psalter be read as a journal demonstrating obedience emerging from questioning the will of God to praise as a thankful outcome.²³ Again, this prototype is evidenced in Psalm 31, where the theme of *hesed* clearly emerges.

The Theme of Hesed

I argue that David's understanding of the *hesed* of God was the overarching and unifying theme of David's life that motivated his leadership activity and perseverance, as well as his writing of the psalms. Of the psalms attributed to David, twenty-seven of them reference the *hesed* of God.²⁴ In this subsection, the theme of *hesed* is explored related to its meaning and how David understood the *hesed* of God activated in his life.

The Hebrew word *hesed* (חֶסֶד) typically has been translated as love, kindness, loving kindness, or mercy and seen as manifesting God's character.²⁵ In 1927, the work of Nelson Glueck laid the foundation for viewing *hesed* as deriving from God's

²² Broyles, *New International Biblical Commentary*, p. 7. Also see Gerard H. Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms—Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 23. Wilson maintains that the psalms were not intended for private prayer but rather for community worship. However, one cannot miss that the psalms attributed to David, as well as the other psalms, bespeak the authors' personal contexts and situations of distress, lament, praise, victory, and deliverance, and proclamation from which the psalms have endured over time as vehicles of hope for the believing community.

²³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3-32.

²⁴ The twenty-seven psalms where David specifically references the *hesed* of God include Psalm 6:4; 13:5; 17:7; 18:1; 21:7; 23:6; 25:6-7; 26:3,8; 31:7, 16, 21, 23; 36:5, 7, 10; 40:10, 11, 16; 51:1; 52:8; 57:3,10; 60:5; 61:7; 63:3; 69:13, 16, 36; 70:4; 86:5, 13, 16; 101:1; 103:2-5; 103:8, 11, 17; 108:4, 6; 138:2, 8; 143:8, 13; and 145:8, 20.

²⁵ See R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 305-07.

covenantal relationship with Israel. In Glueck's view, God's obligation to Israel flowed from covenantal loyalty rather than love or mercy, per say. Although some support this interpretation,²⁶ others have challenged his view. Acknowledging that the term *hesed* is difficult to translate, Katherine D. Sakenfeld maintained that the term connotes voluntary acts of faithfulness and deliverance.²⁷ Sakenfeld selects "loyalty" as her preferred English translation but submits that the word may draw negative connotations (i.e., blind loyalty). She maintains that *hesed* conjoins both attitude (i.e., view of a subordinate to a superior) and action (i.e., demonstrations of loyalty in God's initiatives to people of faith).²⁸ For Sakenfeld, *hesed* involves freedom, commitment, help in need, deliverance, and "depends on everyway upon God's faithfulness."²⁹

Gordon R. Clark offers an additional insight regarding word meaning. He observes that both truth and faithfulness are essential components of *hesed*, signifying a lasting personal commitment to one another in relationship. Although grace, mercy, and compassion implicitly connect to *hesed*, Clark maintains that the meaning is much more than any of these. He asserts that *hesed* is an enduring quality of God, rather than human beings, which leads to the recipient's benefit. For example, Yahweh repeatedly demonstrated *hesed* to Israel by God's ongoing commitment to Israel, despite her persistent rebellion and unfaithfulness. Clark asserts, "Yahweh expects his people to emulate this quality [*hesed*] that he so frequently demonstrates, even though people's expression of it can be only a pale reflection of Yahweh's."³⁰ As Brueggemann asserts, "God's *hesed* is everything. That *hesed* overrides, contextualizes and transforms guilt and finitude."³¹ Thus, *hesed* becomes a potent realization, not only in the life of David but also in the ethos of Israel's existence. Psalm 31 provides a window into understanding the contextual nuances that forge David's understanding of God's *hesed*.

IV. PSALM 31: AN EXAMPLE OF DRAWING UPON THE *HESED* OF GOD

I argue that an understanding of David's leadership persistence is directly tied to his understanding of *hesed*, as reflected in the Psalms attributed to him. One representative Davidic psalm, Psalm 31, conveys David's sense of God's personal love for him throughout desperate leadership crises that crescendo into a crying out to God for help in distress and a certainty that God will deliver him, as God had done in the past. Broyles asserts that the primary motif of Psalm 31 is Yahweh's love or *hesed*, evidenced in each of the psalm's sections.³² Therefore, amidst the obvious tension

²⁶ See Gottfried Quell and Ethelbert Stauffer, *Love: Bible Key Words* (London: Adam and Charles Black Limited, 1949). They comment: "There can be no doubt that the Covenant is an expression in juridical language of the experience of God's love: the whole Covenant theory is based on the idea of love" (p. 11).

²⁷ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁰ Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series, 157 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 267.

³¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 50 (1991): 77-78.

³² Broyles, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 160.

between what David knows personally (i.e., God is his rock, refuge, and fortress, vv. 2-3) and what is known publically (i.e., he is slandered, in distress, and seemingly destitute, vv. 11-13), God emerges as protector and public vindicator.

David's deep reception and assurance of the love of God enabled him to have confidence in the Lord, proven previously through repeated deliverances. This confidence in the Lord's love eventuated in David's powerful prayer in Psalm 31, in which he declares sixteen manifestations and benefits of God's love. Because God's nature is love, these sixteen outcomes of God's love are available for every believer in Christ, but are particularly vital in the exercise of leadership for followers of Jesus, regardless of leadership context. First, we turn to the structure and overview of Psalm 31 before reviewing the theme of *hesed* in the psalm and describing the benefits that David experienced from God's *hesed*.

Structure and Overview of Psalm 31

Although scholars disagree regarding the precise outline of the psalm as to whether it contains two, three, or more parts,³³ the overall psalm of petition is interwoven with expressions of trust, distress/lamentation, and thanksgiving. William H. Bellinger asserts that this psalm is an individual lament.³⁴ Several scholars have questioned if Psalm 31 is a composite work by anonymous authors. However, Willem VanGemenen views the psalm as an original work, similar to the prayer language found in other psalms and the prayers of Jonah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations.³⁵ As Kraus suggests, "Psalm 31 is the model prayer that is confident of being heard," while "every sentence of the petition reflects expressions of confidence."³⁶

Regarding the psalm's structure, section one (vv. 1-5) addresses the need for help in times of crisis. Section two (vv. 6-8) acknowledges the Lord's great love resulting in trust in Him. Section three (vv. 9-13) incorporates a lament resulting from distress,

³³ See A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Vol 1* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 245. Anderson views the psalm in parts (i.e., trust in God: vv. 1-8; lamentation: 9-18; praise and thanksgiving: vv. 19-24). Also see several other scholars' renderings of the psalm's structure. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 360-61. Kraus suggests two sections (vv. 1-8, 9-24), with both parts expressing lament, trust, and thanksgiving. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* (London: InterVarsity, 1973), 130-31. Similar to Kraus, Kidner views the Psalm 31 in two parts with these themes: the hunted man (vv. 1-8) and as the rejected man (vv. 9-24). Broyles, *New International Biblical Commentary*, p. 160. Broyles views Psalm 31 in four parts (i.e., two self-contained prayers: vv. 1-3 and 9-18; praise: vv. 19-22; and exhortation: vv. 23-24). James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 269. Boice sees the psalm as consisting of six parts (vv. 1-5, 6-8, 9-13, 14-18, 19-20, 21-24) as does Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 527.

³⁴ William H. Bellinger, Jr., "Psalms and Prophecy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (1984): 32-33.

³⁵ Willem A. VanGemenen, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs), ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 262. I concur with VanGemenen's view that Psalm 31 is an original work of one author. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend David's authorship, I submit that Psalm 31 aligns with the ethos of other Davidic psalms in the treatment of *hesed*.

³⁶ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 365.

rejection, slander, and possible illness. Section four (vv. 14-18) declares trust in God's unfailing love. Section five (vv. 19-22) pronounces praise to God for His goodness, love (*hesed*), and deliverance. And section six (vv. 23-24) exhorts others to trust in God. Table 2 provides an overview of this structure, which aligns with James Montgomery Boice and Gerald H. Wilson's perspectives.³⁷

Table 2. Structure of Psalm 31 identified by section

Sections	Psalm 31:1-24	
<i>Verses 1-5</i>		
Help in times of trouble	v. 1	In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in Your righteousness.
	v. 2	Turn Your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.
	v. 3	Since You are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of Your name lead and guide me.
	v. 4	Free me from the trap that is set for me, for You are my refuge.
	v. 5	Into Your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth.
<i>Verses 6-8</i>		
Acknowledgement of the Lord's great love (<i>hesed</i>) and trust in God	v. 6	I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the Lord.
	v. 7	I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.
	v. 8	You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.
<i>Verses 9-13</i>		
Lament resulting from distress, rejection, slander, and possible illness	v. 9	Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.
	v. 10	My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my

³⁷ See James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Psalms 1-41*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 268-275, esp. 271; Wilson, *Psalms*, 525-42.

Sections	Psalm 31:1-24
	affliction, and my bones grow weak.
	v. 11 Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends—those who see me on the street flee from me.
	v. 12 I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery.
	v. 13 For I hear the slander of many; there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life.
<i>Verses 14-18</i>	
Declaration of trust in God because of God's unfaithful love	v. 14 But I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."
	v. 15 My times are in Your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.
	v. 16 Let Your face shine on your servant; save me in Your unfaithful love.
	v. 17 Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to You; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave.
	v. 18 Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.
<i>Verses 19-22</i>	
Praise to God for God's goodness, love (<i>hesed</i>), and deliverance	v. 19 How great is Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, which You bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in You.
	v. 20 In the shelter of Your presence You hide them from the intrigues of men; in Your dwelling You keep them safe from accusing tongues.
	v. 21 Praise be to the Lord, for He showed His wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city.
	v. 22 In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from Your sight!" Yet You heard my cry for mercy when I called to You for help.

Sections	Psalm 31:1-24	
<i>Verses 23-24</i>		
Exhortation to others to trust God	v. 23	Love the Lord, all His saints! The Lord preserves the faithful, but the proud He pays back in full.
	v. 24	Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

Hesed in Psalm 31

The emotional heart of the psalm, as Boice asserts, is found in verses 9-13 where the “Sitz im Leben,” or situation/context, is most clearly identified. David is weak, in great distress, filled with grief (vv. 9-10), overcome by rejection of enemies and friends (v. 11), forgotten (v. 12), slandered, and threatened with murder (vv. 4, 13).³⁸ Yet throughout the psalm, David emotes declarations of trust in God’s *hesed* because God had seen David’s affliction (v. 7: “I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul”), which in turn reinforces trust. Only those who feel loved can trust completely. Further, David exclaims in verse 21: “Praise be to the Lord, for He showed His wonderful love (*hesed*) to me.” The human forces countering David at every turn are subsumed under David’s cry for help, as he reiterates God’s faithful deliverance in former times (v. 8: “You have not handed me over to my enemies,” and v. 21 referencing deliverance when in a besieged city).

David’s confidence in the Lord resulting from his awareness of being loved by God enabled him to trust God as his rock, fortress, guide, and refuge (vv. 2-4). As such, David could surrender himself completely into the hands of God (v. 5) and rejoice in God’s *hesed* (v. 7). During this occasion of extreme turmoil and threat of physical demise (v. 13: “there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life”), David depends exclusively upon God’s faithfulness, previously proven in times of threat (v. 22: “Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to You for help”). Again, as in times past, David implores the Lord to show him favor based upon God’s love for him (v. 16: “Let Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your unfailing love,” and v. 17: “Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to You.”). He is assured that God will hear him this time (v. 14: “But I trust in You, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’”).

As Broyles maintains, the primary motif in Psalm 31 relates to the *hesed* of God, explicitly evidenced in verse 7 and 21, while implicitly evidenced in verses 16 and 23.³⁹ As previously noted in Sakenfeld’s interpretation of the word, *hesed* involves freedom, commitment, help in time of need, deliverance, and God’s faithfulness and loyalty to those of faith.⁴⁰ Further, Psalm 31 affirms what Clark advances, namely that *hesed* reveals God’s truth, faithfulness, and lasting commitment to God’s beloved, while also

³⁸ Boice, *Psalms*, 271.

³⁹ Broyles, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 160.

⁴⁰ Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action*, 137.

connoting grace, mercy, and compassion.⁴¹ Brueggemann's assertion that to the people of God "God's *hesed* is everything," even transforming guilt and finitude, is personified here in David's realization of God's all-encompassing love and mercy.⁴² Psalm 31 concludes with a paraenesis confirming God's grace, faithfulness, and *hesed*. God's divine help ultimately rescues David from threats on all sides and ushers the community of faith into further hope in Yahweh's goodness by this prayer of lament, thanksgiving, and praise. David's drawing upon God's *hesed* emerged over time through life experiences and was predicated on attachment to God from childhood as a shepherd boy (c.f., 1 Sam 17:34-37).

In reviewing Psalm 31, sixteen benefits of receiving and drawing upon the love of God are identified in the next section. I argue that these same benefits are available for contemporary leaders of faith who draw upon the love of God during the exercise of leadership inclusive of throughout unexpected circumstances and inevitable challenges, which supersede personal control, experience, and expertise. The underlying premise here is that those who persevere in love and loyalty will be the blessed beneficiaries of God's loving acts.

VI. SIXTEEN LEADERSHIP BENEFITS OF RECEIVING AND DRAWING UPON THE *HESED* OF GOD

Psalm 31 becomes a prayer prototype for contemporary men and women of faith who, by virtue of their leadership calling and gifting, encounter leadership challenges, hindrances, obstacles, and disappointments. If, as Boice suggests, Psalm 31 takes on the tone of "you are . . . then be" and that this should be the prayer of every Christian, how much more should this be the disposition of leaders who exercise leadership in the various contexts to which they are called?⁴³ Parenthetically, commentator J.J. Stewart Perowne identified key Christian leaders who following Jesus' example of quoting Psalm 31:5 as they approached death: Saint Bernard, John Huss, Jerome of Prague, Martin Luther, and Philip Melancthon.⁴⁴ We might infer that they too received the sixteen benefits of drawing upon God's *hesed* during their leadership tenures.

The sixteen benefits of receiving and drawing upon the love of God found in Psalm 31 include: (1) protection and refuge, (2) deliverance, (3) trust, (4) guidance, (5) surrender, (6) love, (7) comfort and empathy, (8) rejoicing and praise, (9) mercy, (10) freedom to emote, (11) acceptance by God in light of rejection by man, (12) justice, (13) goodness, (14) assurance of God's presence, (15) God's faithfulness, and (16) hope and encouragement. Table 3 provides a grid for identifying these benefits by the respective verses in Psalm 31.

Table 3. Sixteen benefits of receiving God's *hesed* for Christian leaders

⁴¹ Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 267.

⁴² Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 50 (1991): 77-78.

⁴³ See Boice, *Psalms*, 270.

⁴⁴ J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1989), 1:284-285. Original edition: 1878-1879.

Specific benefits		Psalm 31 verses
1. Protection/refuge	:1a	In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame.
	:2b	. . . be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.
	:4	Free me from the trap that is set for me, for You are my refuge.
	: 20b	. . . in Your dwelling You keep them safe from accusing tongues.
2. Deliverance	:1b	. . . deliver me in Your righteousness.
	:2a	Turn Your ear to me and come quickly to my rescue.
	:8	You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.
	:15b	. . . deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.
3. Trust	:3a	Since You are my rock and my fortress . . . (affirmation of trust)
	:6	I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the Lord.
	:14	But I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."
4. Guidance	:3b	. . . for Your sake lead and guide me.
5. Surrender	:5a	Into Your hands I commit my spirit . . .
	:15	My times are in Your hands . . .
6. Love	:7	I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction . . .
	:16	Let Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your unfailing love . . .
	:21	Praise to the Lord for He showed me His wonderful love when I was in a besieged city.
	:23a	Love the Lord, all His saints . . . [paraenesis]
7. Comfort/empathy	:7b	. . . You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.
8. Rejoicing/praise	:7a	I will be glad and rejoice in Your love . . .
	:21	Praise be to the Lord for He showed His wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged

Specific benefits		Psalm 31 verses
		city.
9. Mercy	:9a	Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress.
	:22	In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from Your sight!" Yet You heard my cry for mercy when I called to You for help.
10. Freedom to emote	:9b	. . . my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.
	:10	My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.
11. Acceptance by God/rejection by man	:11-13	Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends—those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear the slander of many; there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life.
12. Justice	:17-18	Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to You; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.
13. Goodness	:19	How great is Your goodness, which You have stored up for those who fear You, which You bestow in the sight of men, on those who take refuge in You.
14. Assurance of God's presence	:20a	In the shelter of Your presence You hide them from the intrigues of men . . .
15. God's faithfulness	:23b	The Lord preserves the faithful, but the proud He pays back in full.
16. Hope and encouragement	:24	Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

The first benefit for leaders receiving the *hesed* of God is an assurance of protection, as indicated in Psalm 31:1a, 2, 4, and 20b. David declares that God is his rock, refuge, and fortress. When leaders are following the Lord, they can be assured that He will protect them. Second, God's power to deliver when human resources are no match for obstacles and threats is a consistent theme throughout the Psalms and

indicated verses 1b, 2a, 8, and 15b.⁴⁵ As a God of supernatural power, God promises to deliver those who trust Him. The third benefit relates to trust, as shown in verses 3a, 6, and 14. God is a God who promotes trust in those who follow Him because He is completely trustworthy. The fourth benefit found in verse 3b is guidance. God will guide leaders who put their trust in Him and who obediently follow Him.

The fifth benefit is surrender (vv. 5a, 15). Surrender connotes a place of humility and dependence. God is able to undertake on behalf of leaders who are without resources and humbly receive his grace (cf. Ps 25:9, Prv 3:34). The sixth benefit of receiving the *hesed* of God is to personally experience His loving kindness, which keeps leaders attached to God in a secure fashion and able to counter tendencies toward anxiety and avoidance, as well as withstand the waves of difficulties inherent in leading (vv. 7, 16, 21, 23a). The seventh benefit is the provision of God's comfort and empathy (v. 7b). In His omniscience, God understands the unique challenges that leaders face and is ready to come to their aid (cf. Ps 23:4, 71:21, 119:76; Is 57:18; Jer 31:13). The eighth benefit of receiving the *hesed* of God is the fostering of a deep sense of rejoicing and praise. Knowing that one is loved by God creates an inexplicable sense of gratitude that can only be fully expressed through joy in the heart and expressed in praise to Him (vv. 7a, 19, 21).

The ninth benefit relates to appropriating God's mercy, or kindness, which is a quality of God's character that extends grace and enablement to those in need (vv. 9a, 22). Freedom to emote one's deepest feelings is the tenth benefit of receiving the God's *hesed* (vv. 9b, 10). When leaders are securely attached to God, they can honestly express their array of feelings—both positive and negative, as David did consistently in psalms. The eleventh benefit of receiving God's *hesed* is an awareness of being accepted by God, even when rejected by men (vv. 11-13). Biblical exemplars such as Joseph, Abraham, Moses, Jephthah, Nehemiah, and Esther support this assertion. The twelfth benefit relates to justice (vv. 17-18). By receiving God's love and being under His protection, David knew that God would undertake on his behalf and therefore was inclined not to seek vengeance or mete out justice in his own strength.

The thirteenth benefit of receiving God's *hesed* entails receiving His goodness (v. 19). God's character is inherently good, and His goodness and mercy go hand-in-hand. Those who experience God's goodness are led to rejoice in that they qualify as recipients of his blessings. Benefit fourteen relates to assurance of God's presence, even when circumstances seem desperate, hopeless, and risky (v. 20). Knowing God is with us in times of dire circumstances reassures us that God is present and able to help (cf. Ps 23:4). Benefit fifteen brings an awareness of God's faithfulness that ties *hesed* together with His mercy, loyalty, goodness, comfort, guidance, and deliverance (v. 23b). God will not violate His faithfulness and overflows with responsiveness to those who humbly seek Him. Finally, benefit sixteen focuses on hope and encouragement (v. 24). Being a recipient of God's *hesed* means drawing hope for the future, knowing that God is the author of every the leaders' next steps and will provide all of the needed resources to move them forward (cf. Ps. 25:3, 33:17, 42:5, 62:5, 130:5-7, 146:5, 147:11).

⁴⁵ See Pss 3:8, 32:7, 33:17, 34:4, 72:12, 107:6, 109:21, 116:8, and 119:170. God is a deliverer who rescues those who cry out to Him (cf. Pss. 18:2, 40:17, 70:5, 140:7, and 144:2).

An analysis of the life of David, attachment theory, the theme of *hesed* in the Davidic psalms, and Psalm 31 as a focal lens provides insights for contemporary Christian leaders related to receiving the love of God as an essential component of leadership vitality and perseverance. Leadership can be a lonely enterprise where leaders are embedded in ongoing and often competing demands that can weary even the strongest among us. Further, opposition to leaders becomes inherent in the exercise of leadership, filled with danger as Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linski note.⁴⁶ Like David expressed in Psalm 31, leaders may feel isolated, abandoned, unjustly attacked, and without natural resources.

Through Psalm 31, the life of David informs leaders how they can shape their responses in such times of adversity through crying out to God for His mercy and deliverance (vv. 2, 22), surrendering their very lives to His providence (vv. 5, 15), unashamedly communicating adversities (vv. 9-13), clinging to God through trust proclamations (vv. 6, 14), recalling God's past faithfulness (vv. 8, 21b), and, most importantly, depending upon God's personal love for them for leadership longevity (vv. 7, 16, 21, 23).

When leaders securely attach to God and follow Him obediently, they can know that God will sustain them through difficulties. Similarly as the love of God in David's life served as a catalyst for his leadership motivation, strength, endurance, hope, deliverance, and destiny, God's love invites contemporary leaders to embed themselves in His protective hands, while God's grace and mercy provide the shelter from adversarial forces that seek to discourage, dismantle, and destroy leadership effectiveness. In times of crises, leaders can strengthen themselves in the Lord their God (cf. 1 Sam 30:6) and respond in trust and obedience to God. As Baruch Halpern observes, "David, in a word, is human, fully, four-dimensionally, recognizably human. He grows, he learns, he travails, he triumphs, and he suffers immeasurable tragedy and loss."⁴⁷ Such is the condition of each one of God's leaders. However, leaders can receive, as Derek Kidner observes in Psalm 31:24, "an assurance of help to those who dare to count on it," not as a "promise an end to trouble: rather (cf. Lk 22:42, 43) the strength to meet it."⁴⁸

VII. SUMMARY

In this paper, I have argued that receiving and drawing upon the love (*hesed*) of God is integral to every Christian leader's core identity formation and leadership perseverance. As an exemplar of receiving the *hesed* of God, David's life provides a lens signifying the importance of healthy attachment to God as the backbone of leadership vitality and longevity. The Davidic psalms align with the Biblical narrative in offering Christian leaders a prototype of what to do in the exercise of leadership when encountering obstacles, threats, trials, and opposition. In particular, focusing on Psalm 31, a representative psalm which spotlights David's many leadership challenges, moved

⁴⁶ See Ron Heifetz and Marty Linski, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), esp. ch. 1 and 2.

⁴⁷ Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 6.

⁴⁸ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 132-33.

us closer to the vortex of understanding the balance between leadership challenges and how to navigate them by articulating sixteen benefits of receiving the love of God.

With the demands inherent in leadership, the source of a Christian leader's identity must be predicated on the realization that he or she is first and foremost personally loved by God, followed then by a sense of leadership calling. So when the storms of challenge come, the leader will be secure and whole in the center of his or her soul. In situations where one's weak foundations are exposed and leadership failure may seem imminent, the leader can still draw upon the loving kindness, mercy, and loyalty of God that ushers from the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul addressed this dynamic when exhorting the Corinthian church: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). Paul could attest to light and momentary troubles that were achieving an eternal glory that far outweighed them all (cf. 4:17).

So too, contemporary Christian leaders must realize that leadership testings and challenges are sovereignly permitted by God to strengthen their inward resilience and to foster greater dependency upon God, who remains eternally faithful. The challenge for leaders is to realize that by pressing into God's presence and receiving a greater personal revelation of the love of God is both sustaining and empowering. The psalms provide a veritable smorgasbord for contemporary leaders who find themselves in the grip of discouragement and defeat,⁴⁹ with Psalm 31 offering particular leadership insights. Like David, leaders can draw upon the love and supernatural power of God to protect and deliver them, believing that God will provide the spiritual and emotional arsenal to withstand their darkest hour.

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⁴⁹ See Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). Peterson provides guidance as to how to utilize the psalms as vehicles for prayer.

Personal leadership is a way to lead yourself from the inside out and apply proven business skills to get more out of life. In *The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership*, Joelle K. Jay shares insights into why and how personal leadership is one of your most powerful tools for achieving more meaning and creating the life you want. What Is Personal Leadership.â Personal leadership is the self-confident ability to crystalize your thinking and establish an exact direction for your own life, to commit yourself to moving in that direction, and then to take determined action to acquire, accomplish, or become whatever you identify as the ultimate goal in your life.â Design, Create, and Achieve Your Ideal Life. God scans the world seeking legitimate leadership potential. God takes the young David from the foothills surrounding Bethlehem to place him on the throne.â Leadership failure has been one of the top stories in the United States recently. This year has been an interesting time in the world of politics. Our country has seen the billionaire, Donald Trump, rise to such a high level in the national polls that it is unusual and confusing many in the Washington world and the press. What is going on? Why is this happening? There is a scream across the nation, âWe need a strong leader!â Not only is this coming from Democrats and Republicans, but it also can be heard in the ranks of the Libertarian Party and the Socialist Party.