



# NCD Sample Pages: *The 3 Colors of Ministry*

This is a low resolution PDF export of sample pages from the book *The 3 Colors of Ministry* by Christian A. Schwarz. You may view them online, but are also invited to download them to your hard disk or print them out for reading on paper.

The sample pages contain the table of contents plus pages 7-34 which present the basis on which the whole book has been developed. These pages may give you an idea of the character and layout of the book, so that you can decide whether it is useful for your purposes. The remaining pages relate the program described here explicitly to the area of discovering and developing your spiritual gifts, both individually and in a local church context.

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# The 3 Colors of Ministry



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# What you can expect from this book

## Introduction

**W**ill you be a happier person once you have reached the end of this book? Probably not. Will you be more effective in ministry as a consequence of reading the following chapters? No, you shouldn't expect this. Will your church experience a new phase of growth if the leadership studies this manual? I am sorry, but there is absolutely no indication whatsoever that this might happen.

### What, then, is the benefit of this book?

I hate to make promises that generate expectations which cannot be met, yet there are benefits that I *can* promise you, if you not only study, but *apply*, what you read. Our research in about 50 countries and more than 7,000 churches worldwide proves that it is realistic to expect the following things to happen:

- Once you have put into practice the steps suggested in this book, you *can* expect to be a happier person. Fifty-one percent of the people who went through this book's Gift Test indicated that they were "happier" as a result. This number increased to 72 percent when the discovered gifts were applied to concrete tasks within the church.
- If you put your gifts into practice, you *can* expect to be more effective in ministry. Our research shows that there is no other isolated factor that has a stronger bearing on your "effectiveness" than living in accordance with your gifts.
- If your church puts the philosophy behind this book—we call it natural church development—into practice, it *can* expect to grow. Our studies demonstrate that gift-oriented ministry is one of the key elements of growing churches in China as well as in Colombia, in South Africa as well as in Australia, in Russia as well as in the United States.

Once you have put into practice the steps suggested in this book, you can expect to be a happier person.



### How does this book differ from similar tools?

There is a plethora of tools available that address the development of spiritual gifts, and many of them are excellent. What, then, can you expect to find in this book that you won't find in others?

1. In this book, the process of discovering and implementing one's gifts is linked to the **three dimensions of God's nature**, for which I have chosen the colors green, red, and blue (hence the title of this book). Whereas many tools focus on one or two dimensions of the triune God, *The 3 Colors of Ministry* tries to bring all three dimensions together. This approach has become a revolutionary concept for many believers. Therefore, I have written a short introductory booklet on the subject: *The Threefold Art of Experiencing God*. The practical application of this theological concept is where I see the most important contribution of *The 3 Colors of Ministry*.

Before you begin the actual gift-discovery process, you are invited to find out where your starting point is in relation to these three aspects.

2. A lot of energy has been invested in designing the questionnaire for the gift discovery process so as to fulfill generally accepted **scientific standards** (reliability, validity, objectivity). Probably the majority of Christians don't care whether they have a scientific questionnaire or just a "home-made version." However, since we have worked with those "home-made versions" ourselves (because for years nothing else was available), we can now compare the results of both approaches. The scientific procedure produces much more accurate results.
3. The subject of this book is one of the eight building blocks of **Natural Church Development** (NCD). Because all of these building blocks are interrelated, once you have successfully implemented "gift-oriented ministry" you can apply the same principles to the remaining seven areas. All of the NCD books are focused on releasing the "growth automatism by which God himself grows his church." Therefore, I am extremely careful not to include anything technocratic, manipulative, or model-oriented in the NCD books. I want to teach only those principles that have been demonstrated to be used by God around the globe to grow his church.

Thousands of Christians have told us that God has used this tool to show them their calling.



#### What most tools have in common

Apart from these distinctives, I have tried to learn from others. Most of the material in the area of gift-oriented ministry that is available today has been inspired by the pioneering work of C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (first published in 1979). Literally hundreds of thousands of Christians around the world have experienced a paradigm shift as a result of this book, and I am one of them. For this reason, I have deliberately tried to keep close to Peter Wagner's terminology (for instance, when I define the individual gifts or describe the discovery steps).

Even if *The 3 Colors of Ministry* has a somewhat different starting point, I have deliberately tried to keep it compatible with the many wonderful tools that have been inspired by Peter Wagner's book.

Christians who have worked with the predecessor version of *The 3 Colors of Ministry* have reported that God has used this tool to show them their unique calling. I have not heard a single report of one that has regretted the experiences of this process. If there is so much to gain and nothing to lose, let's start the process.

# What are the three colors of ministry?

*At many Christian conferences I have heard it said, "What we urgently need is a new level of dedication among Christians," which sounds as if increasing our personal commitment were the key to all of our problems. Among other Christians the motto is, "The only thing that can change the state of our churches is supernatural power." And a third group teaches, "If we Christians simply acted more wisely, we would probably be amazed at how many problems would disappear." Well, who is right? In a way, all of them are right, and in another way, none of them is right. The simple truth is this: The very thing that might be "right" for some Christians would be completely misleading for others. Not all Christians need more commitment, but some do. Not all Christians need more power, but some do. Not all Christians need more wisdom, but some do. How can we discover what is the greatest need in our own lives?*

# Three ways to experience God

**D**o you have the impression that you already understand God's nature? Are you convinced that you really experience the "fullness of life" that the New Testament promises? Do you think that your church lives 100 percent according to God's plan and that there is no need even to think about changing directions?

If you have answered "yes" to these questions, I first want to congratulate you, and second, I would like to say "good bye" to you. This book

has not been written for you. It has been written for Christians who are striving constantly to grow in their understanding of God—rationally, emotionally, and socially. It has been written for those who dare to reconsider the answers that they have found so far, and who are open to learn new things about God, about the church, and about themselves.

## The center of the Christian faith

In this book (as well as in the other books in this series), I don't want to speak to you about certain fringe issues of theology, but about the center of our Christian faith—the one God who has revealed himself in three different ways: as Creator, in Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit. Look at the diagram on page 11. As pure white light shining through a prism refracts into the different colors of the spectrum, so God has revealed different aspects of his nature in three major revelations: Creation (green segment), Calvary (red segment), and Pentecost (blue segment). The dilemma of Christianity is that, while we might give intellectual assent to this threefold revelation, when it comes to everyday practical experience,

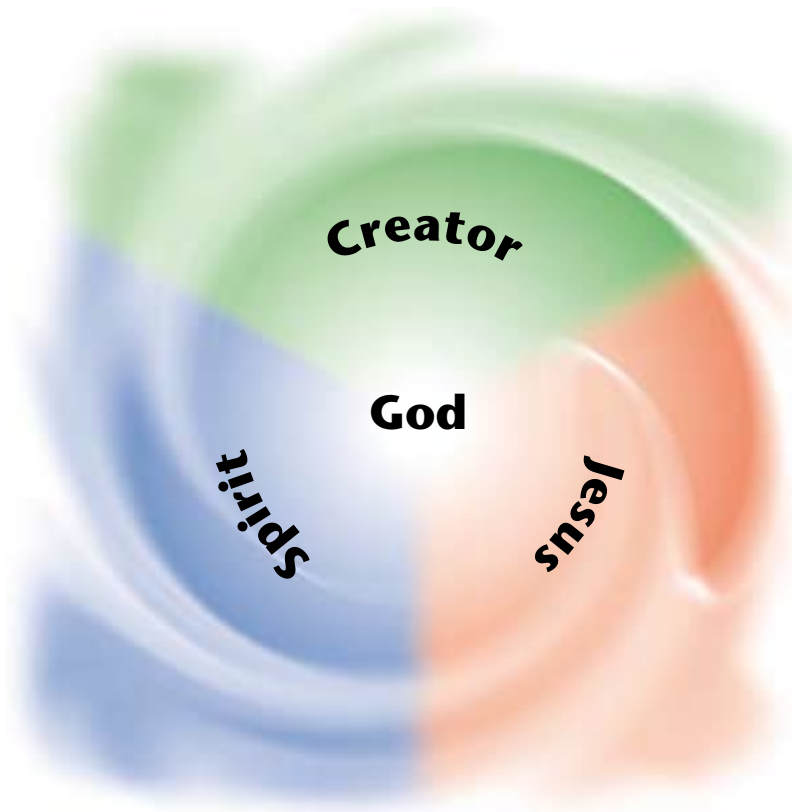
most of us are miles from integrating all three dimensions into our personal lives. There are some Christians who seem exclusively to see red, others only blue, and others only green. And if we have a limited understanding of God, we are in danger of portraying only limited aspects of God's nature in our lives and churches.

## A segmented faith

In my own ministry in very different denominations and cultures, I have encountered purely "green" churches as well as purely "red" and purely "blue" ones. Sometimes I find combinations of two of the colors—how wonderful!—but very seldom do I find a truly "three-colored," trinitarian church: totally *Christ-centered*, stressing the absolute claims of Jesus, and inviting people to find a personal relationship with him (red segment); living in the *power of the Holy Spirit*, not only teaching about, but experiencing the supernatural dimension of our faith (blue segment); and all of this based on principles that God has revealed to us in *creation* that we share with nonbelievers, which include striving for the preservation of creation, social justice, human rights, and peace (green segment). I am convinced that most of the problems that we face as individual

Many Christians are acquainted only with certain aspects of God's nature, and new discoveries are waiting for them.





*According to the Bible, God has revealed himself in three different ways: as Creator (green segment), in Jesus (red segment), and in the Holy Spirit (blue segment). Each of these three revelations corresponds to a specific way in which we can experience God. Problems start as soon as we emphasize one of the three "colors" and neglect the others.*

believers or as churches, in the final analysis, have their roots in our limited understanding of the triune God. This is a rather frustrating situation!

### **Change is possible**

But here comes the good news. I have seen again and again that this situation can be changed. Regardless of the condition of a believer or a church right now (emphasizing the green, red, or blue segment), it is possible to integrate the other colors as well. I have seen totally "green" churches (with all their limitations and dangers) moving more and more into the "red" and the "blue" dimensions, and I have seen "blue" and "red" churches expanding their ministry into the "green" area, thus experiencing growth in their effectiveness.

Look at the diagram above. If one wanted to describe the starting points of these churches, it would be necessary to draw three circles: one in the green segment, another in the red, and another in the blue. There is only one circle that can encompass all three colors, and that would be a circle around the center. This is a metaphor for the journey that I would like to invite you to take. Wherever your starting point might be, the nearer you draw to the center, the more you will radiate all three colors.

Chapter 1:  
Foundations

# Goal: The Three-Color Christian

The three colors stand for three different dimensions of life. Our goal should be to invite God into each of these areas, at which point we become "Three-Color Christians." This term does not refer to any "perfect" state that would be unrealistic to achieve. The Three-Color Christian will not always radiate all of the three colors, but more importantly, he or she will deeply desire to do so. We will only experience greater fruitfulness if all three dimensions are integrated into our lives.

The Three-Color Christian will not always radiate all of the three colors, but he or she will deeply desire to do so.



### Are you a Three-Color Christian?

If you want to find out if you are already a Three-Color Christian, it is helpful to check a variety of areas. It might be that in some areas of your life you are typically "blue," while in other areas, you show more "red" or "green." For starters, look at the six diagrams at the bottom of this double page. Each of them represents one aspect of reality (I could add literally hundreds of further examples) and shows the specific "green," "red," and "blue" dimensions of the issue under consideration.

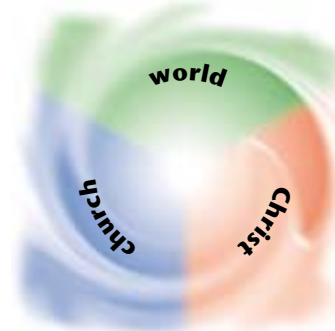
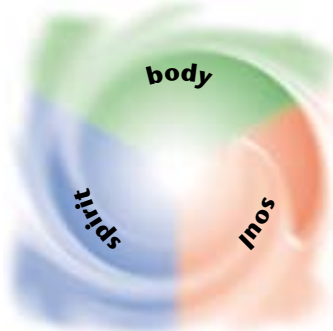
We have already dealt with the *first diagram*, the three works of God: Creation (green segment), Calvary (red segment), and Pentecost (blue segment). For most Christians, one or two of these three works have more importance than the others. This is normal. However, we must never allow any of these three works to be excluded from our Christian experience.

Look at the *second diagram*, which describes three dimensions of life. The ancient Greeks referred to this as body (green segment), soul (red segment), and spirit (blue segment). One could argue whether separating life into these three dimensions is really "Christian," or "Greek." My answer would be that any separation is not Christian. Rather, integrating all three dimensions is the biblical goal. Is any one of the three dimensions more important to you than the others?

Three works of God

Three dimensions of life

Three conversions



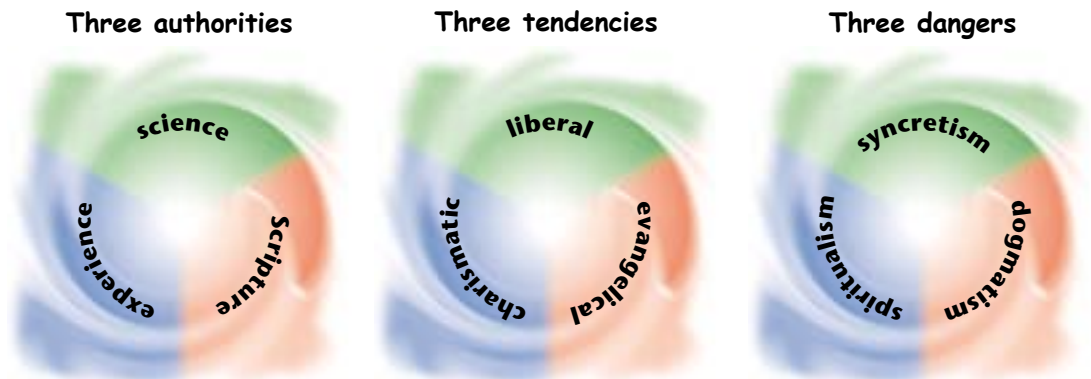
Now turn to the *third diagram*. Nicolaus Zinzendorf, one of the fathers of Pietism, and thus one of the fathers of the evangelical movement today, taught that every Christian needs three "conversions": first, a conversion from the world to Christ (red segment); second, a conversion to the church (blue segment); and third, a conversion back to the world (green segment). If this final stage is not reached, Christians will probably not be very effective in their ministry to the world. Where would you say you are in your spiritual development?

The *fourth diagram* shows three authorities: science (green segment), Scripture (red segment), and experience (blue segment). Each of them is important, and none of them must be downgraded or excluded—even if they don't all have the same value. Which of these authorities is really decisive in your daily life?

In the *fifth diagram* I have listed three tendencies that we find in worldwide Christianity. Is it really a coincidence that each of them has a special affinity for one of the three colors? Liberals advocate the creation revelation (green segment), evangelicals advocate the salvation revelation (red segment), and charismatics advocate the personal revelation (blue segment). Do you feel more comfortable in one of these groups than in the others?

And finally, the *sixth diagram* describes the specific dangers of the three groups mentioned above: the danger of liberals would be "syncretism" (green segment), the danger of evangelicals, "dogmatism" (red segment), and the danger of charismatics, "spiritualism" (blue segment). By this statement I don't mean that every evangelical tends toward dogmatism, every liberal is syncretistic, etc. However, these dangers exist as soon as one of the three elements is isolated from the other two. Heresy is not necessarily the opposite of truth; very often it is something

**We will only experience greater fruitfulness if all three dimensions are integrated into our lives.**



The background of the three colors being used in this book are God's major acts in history: the "creation revelation" (green segment), symbolized by the rainbow; the "salvation revelation" (red segment), symbolized by the cross; and the "personal revelation" (blue segment), symbolized by the dove.



far more subtle—a partial truth. Have you ever encountered one of the three dangers described here?

### **Toward a balanced biblical faith**

Creation, Calvary, and Pentecost—all of them are indispensable for a healthy, balanced, biblical faith. Let me exaggerate a little bit to make my point clear. There are people for whom only God's revelation in creation seems to constitute what is important in Christianity; for others, it is exclusively Calvary; for others again, exclusively Pentecost. Each of these groups is right in fighting for its specific agenda, but wrong in positioning it against the other groups.

In this book I would like to invite you to become a truly Three-Color Christian: empowered (blue segment), committed (red segment), and wise (green segment). Can this happen? Of course, it can! This is exactly God's desire for every believer.

# Three dimensions of ministry

## Chapter 1: Foundations

**H**ow does all of this relate to gift-oriented ministry? If we approach this subject from the perspective that there is one God who has revealed himself in three different ways, the consequences are far-reaching. Each of the three colors corresponds to one dimension of ministry. It is essential for all of us to find out in which of these three areas we are already strong, and in which areas we need further growth.

### Gifts and the Trinity

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul introduces a truly “trinitarian” view of spiritual gifts. “There are different kinds of gifts,” he writes, “but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”

In the diagram at the bottom of this page you can see how these verses relate to the three colors, blue, red, and green. Spiritual *gifts* are related to the *Holy Spirit* (blue area). *Service* is related to the *Lord*, a term that in New Testament usage usually refers to Jesus (red area). The third term is a little more difficult to grasp: the *working* (we could also translate “effects”) is related to *God* (put into the terminology we have used so far, this would be God the Creator and thus belong to the green area).

It should be noted that the whole idea of this passage is not to separate these three dimensions, but to stress that they belong inextricably together. Problems start as soon as we isolate one of these dimensions from the others.

### The underlying concept

At first sight all of this might seem rather abstract, but as soon as we look at the concept behind the three colors, it becomes eminently practical. In order to describe these concepts, I have chosen the terms *power*, *commitment*, and *wisdom*. “Power” is related to the area of spiritual gifts (blue segment); “commitment,” to the area of service (red segment); and “wisdom,” to the area of creation (green segment).

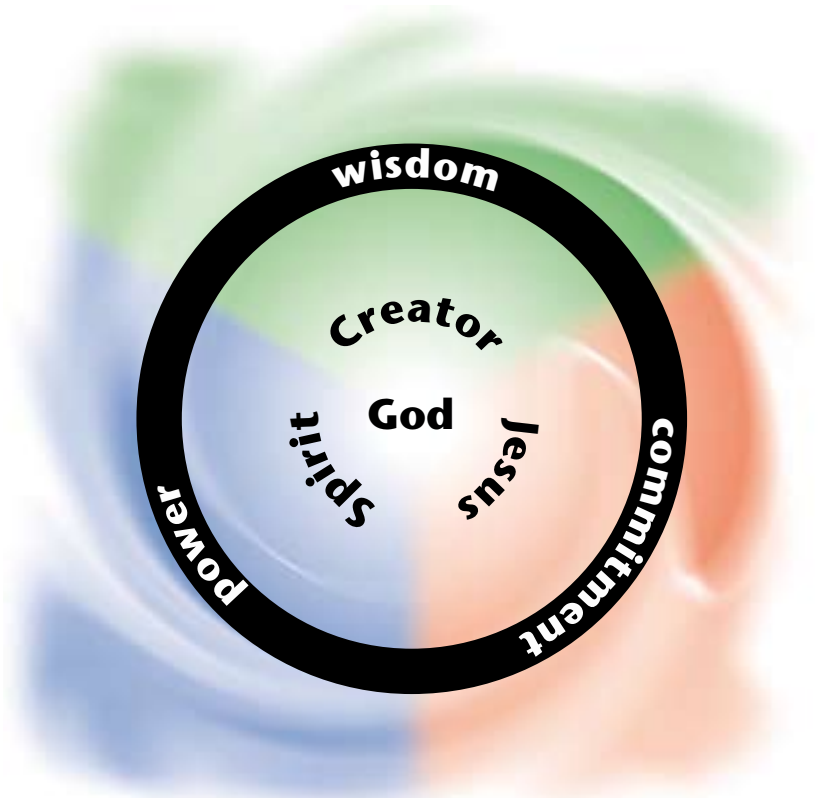
Power plus commitment plus wisdom is the key to a fruitful life.



1 Corinthians 12: 4-6 describes three dimensions (gifts, service, working) and how they relate to the triune God.

<i>There are different kinds of <b>gifts</b>, but the same <b>Spirit</b>.</i>	<b>Spirit</b> → <b>gifts</b>	<b>power</b>
<i>There are different kinds of <b>service</b>, but the same <b>Lord</b>.</i>	<b>Jesus</b> → <b>service</b>	<b>commitment</b>
<i>There are different kinds of <b>working</b>, but the same <b>God</b>.</i>	<b>Creator</b> → <b>working</b>	<b>wisdom</b>

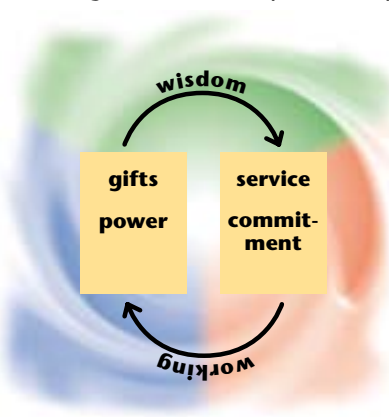
This diagram shows the three dimensions of ministry (power, commitment, and wisdom) and how they relate to the three colors blue, red, and green. Depending on your present starting point, you can determine what you most need in order to become more effective in ministry. For some, the greatest need is empowerment; for others, commitment; and for still others it is wisdom.



On pages 18-20 we will take a closer look at these three terms and what they mean in the Bible. Right now, my goal is simply to show you the central importance of a trinitarian approach to the subject of gift-oriented ministry.

The diagram at the top of this page transfers these concepts to the

*This diagram shows that "gifts/power" and "service/commitment" form two poles that must be related to each other. What brings them together properly is the "wisdom" found in the green segment, in other words, in God's creation.*



trinitarian diagram that we have been using throughout the first few pages of this book. The small diagram (left) shows that "gifts/power" and "service/commitment" form two poles. Power without commitment is useless, but commitment without power is fruitless. Gift-oriented ministry simply means that gifts and service, organism and organization, left pole and right pole, blue color and red color,

are related to each other. And now comes the interesting discovery: What brings both poles together properly is the “wisdom” found in the green segment.

**The most important aspect**

What, then, is the most important aspect for your life: power, commitment, or wisdom? The answer to this question exclusively depends on what your starting point is.

Are you already strong in power and wisdom, but weak in commitment? Or are you strong in commitment and wisdom, but lacking spiritual power? Or are you among those dedicated Christians who are strong in both power and commitment, but need to concentrate on wisdom? If you find the answer to these questions, you will know the direction that your spiritual journey should take.

The reality behind the three colors of ministry is an issue packed with practical relevance. The Bible describes again and again how these three dimensions interrelate. A beautiful example of this is Colossians 1:9-11, where Paul summarizes his prayers for the church in Colosse: “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.” As you can see in the diagram at the bottom of this page, all three “colors” are clearly evident in this passage.

According to some people, the key to success is spiritual power; for others it is commitment; and for still others, wisdom. Without a doubt, power plus commitment plus wisdom is the key to a fruitful life.

**According to some, the key to success is spiritual power; for others, commitment; and for still others, wisdom.**



*Colossians 1:9-11 is another example of the central importance of the three dimensions in ministry.*

<i>For this reason ... we have not stopped praying for you and asking God ...</i>	<b>Prayer for:</b>
<i>... to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding ...</i>	• <b>wisdom</b>
<i>... that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ...</i>	• <b>commitment</b>
<i>... being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.</i>	• <b>power</b>

# The color red: commitment

Red reminds us of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. At the same time, it is a symbol of our commitment to him.



**T**he color red reminds us of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. At the same time, it is a symbol of our commitment to him. It is not by accident that 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 clearly relates Christian “service” to “the Lord,” who is Jesus. Philippians 2:5-8 describes this dimension in an unsurpassed way: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.”

### Taking up the cross

When we study the life of Jesus as described in the New Testament, we cannot escape the fact that there is no discipleship without sacrifice. Jesus taught his disciples clearly, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25).

Following Christ is not a weekend hobby; rather, it is a costly lifestyle. It literally means sacrificing our lives to the Lord. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy,” Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

### The key: obedience

Many Christians stress the importance of commitment, service, dedication, obedience, etc.—and rightly so. Without this dimension the Christian church would cease to exist. These groups worry that the church of Jesus Christ might, in its attempt to “please the world,” give up the dimension of sacrificial commitment which is out of step with the rest of society. Therefore, they quote Paul’s words: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

### Commitment without power and wisdom

While all of this is undoubtedly right and absolutely indispensable, it is not *all* that the Bible teaches about Christian ministry. You could be highly committed, but lack spiritual power; or you might be extremely dedicated to the Lord, but deficient in wisdom. If one of these situations applies to you, it will not help you to stress the dimension of commitment even more. The key to a more fruitful ministry will be found somewhere else.

# The color blue: power

## Chapter 1: Foundations

**I**n Acts 1:8, the risen Christ is quoted as follows: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Everyone who wants to be an effective witness for Christ depends on this power. Of course, you could try to minister without it, but you would probably not be very fruitful. Yet this is the situation of many Christians. They want to be obedient to Christ, but they sense that they literally lack “power from on high.”

With regard to Jesus’ ministry, there are expressions in the New Testament like “the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick” (Luke 5:17). If it is explicitly stated that God’s power was present at that specific time, we can presume that there could have been other times when this power was not present. In Mark 6:5 we even read that Jesus, in a specific situation, *could* not do any miracles. While these statements describe Jesus’ ministry and not our own, we can see that, even for him, “power” was apparently not a static possession, but something that could be present or absent.

### Without power, no fruit

The same dynamic applies all the more to us. Jesus taught his disciples that there might be times when we simply have to *wait*—a fact that those who exclusively stress the importance of commitment seem to forget. “I am going to send you what my Father has promised,” Jesus said, “but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The concept is clear: without power there can be no fruitful ministry. To stress the importance of commitment in such a situation would be counterproductive.

There might be two Christians who do exactly the same kind of ministry, and while one is extremely fruitful, the other despairs. The difference is not necessarily the level of commitment (red area); it might simply be whether or not this commitment is accompanied by divine power (blue area).

### The symbol of the wind

It is interesting that both in Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament) and in Greek (the language of the New Testament) the terms for “wind” and “spirit” are absolutely identical. So it is no accident that in Genesis 2:7 we read that human life literally started by God “breathing the breath of life” into the “dust of the ground.” And when Jesus met his disciples for the first time after his resurrection, we learn that “he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). Thus, it seems fitting to take the color blue as a symbol of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible uses the same term for “Spirit” and “wind.” Blue, then, is a fitting color for the power of the Holy Spirit.



# The color green: wisdom

**W**isdom is, without a doubt, one of the central concepts of both the Old and the New Testaments. There is a whole category of biblical books referred to as “wisdom writings,” which includes Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and in a wider sense the Book of Job and a number of psalms. A vast part of Jesus’ earthly ministry was in the tradition of an Old Testament wisdom teacher.

The New Testament teaches us about the importance of wisdom in ministry. Colossians 4:5 admonishes us, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.” And in James 1:5 we read, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

### The essence of wisdom

But what exactly is wisdom according to the Bible? It is knowledge applied to real life situations, which is eminently practical. The wise person in the Bible is not an abstract philosopher or speculative theoretician, but a person who can relate his or her knowledge to actual questions that people have. Wisdom is the opposite of dogmatism and ideology, thinking in black-and-white categories. To use the terminology of our three-colored diagram, ideally, wise people are able to integrate all three colors, being aware that they depend on spiritual power (blue segment), and that all wisdom must finally result in action (red segment).

### How wisdom can be perverted

I deliberately said “ideally” because this is very often not the case. Wisdom can be isolated from the other two dimensions.

We can find examples of this both in the Old and the New Testaments. For instance, in many cases where Paul uses this term, it has a rather critical connotation. If you study these passages in greater detail, you will discover that what Paul criticizes is never wisdom as described above, but always a concept of wisdom that isolates itself either from spiritual power or commitment, or from both.

### Wisdom and creation

The biblical concept of wisdom is intimately related to creation. The Bible teaches us that God made creation “by wisdom” (Proverbs 3:19). As it has its roots in creation, wisdom is not an exclusively “Christian” business. Nonbelievers can have wisdom as well. In the Old Testament, wisdom is something international and interreligious. 1 Kings 4:30 quite openly states that there was wisdom outside of Israel, for example, in Egypt and among the “men of the East.” If we want to grow in wisdom, there is much for us to learn even outside the Christian context.

The Bible teaches us that God made creation “by wisdom.” Green is the symbol for the wisdom that we can find in God’s creation.



# What is your personal color blend?

## Chapter 1: Foundations

**T**he message of this book is quite simple. Are you lacking power? Strengthen your *spiritual gifts*. Is commitment your weakness? Relate your gifts to concrete *services*. Have you done this and still find that your ministry is not as fruitful as you would like it to be? Strive for more *wisdom*. Knowing your starting point is the precondition for taking the right steps.

### Six basic color blends

But how can you find out what your starting point is? On the following pages, I would like to give you six biblical examples, each of them representing one of six possible scenarios:

1. Strong in wisdom—weak in power and commitment
2. Strong in commitment—weak in power and wisdom
3. Strong in power—weak in commitment and wisdom
4. Strong in commitment and wisdom—weak in power
5. Strong in power and commitment—weak in wisdom
6. Strong in wisdom and power—weak in commitment

### How God deals with imperfect people

When I have studied biblical examples of this kind, my attention has been drawn to the way God deals with imperfect people. He doesn't usually start by rebuking their weak points, but rather acknowledges the areas in which they are already strong. Translated into the terms of our three-colored diagram, he starts by appreciating the value of their most dominant color(s). And then—sometimes very gently, sometimes quite drastically—he opens their eyes to areas in which they are not yet strong and helps them enter those areas. Again, if we translate it into the terminology of our three-colored diagram, he helps them draw nearer to the center.

### Does everybody need the same thing?

In a way, all six of the biblical characters that I am about to describe needed exactly the same thing: to draw nearer to the center. However, the steps they had to take toward the center varied greatly according to their respective starting points. So we could say that each of these believers needed *something very different* in order to finally reach the same destination.

If God deals with people in this way, then take the following pages as an invitation to discover the areas in which you are already strong, as well as those in which you need to grow.

Knowing your starting point is the precondition for taking the right steps.



# Starting point 1: Thomas

The Apostle Thomas (“Doubting Thomas”) is an excellent illustration of what I would like to call the “skeptical believer” (see diagram on page 23). Let’s first have a look at his strong point which was, without a doubt, his critical, questioning mindset that strove to get to the heart of a matter. We should remember that one of Jesus’ pivotal affirmations—“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”—had been provoked by Thomas’ penetrating questions (John 14:5-6). If people like Thomas did not bother us with their sometimes uncomfortable questions, Christianity would very likely crawl down the road of progress.

We need people like Thomas in our churches, people who are simply not willing to take things for granted. They want to know reasons. They want to see proofs. None of us should criticize them for this, even if it might disturb the peace of the majority at times. Rather, all of us would be well-advised to learn from their perspective.

### Thomas’ deficiencies

However, the New Testament indicates that Thomas’ strength was also his weakness. In my experience, people with this degree of analytical thinking often fall short in the other two areas. As excellent as they may be in reflecting and questioning, commitment and power are not their strong points. They often are not present when decisive things happen, and

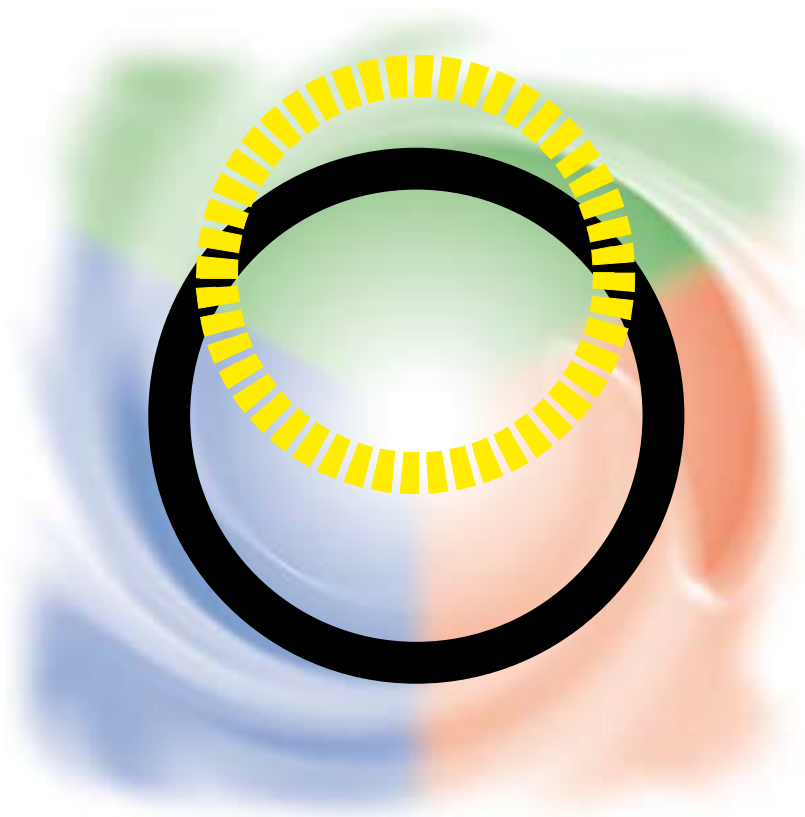
While the skeptical believer is strong in wisdom, his or her primary need is for growth in both power and commitment.



### Example: Gordon from Great Britain

Gordon is a young Anglican priest who refuses to be put in any theological pigeonhole, yet (his protests notwithstanding!) he probably has a certain tendency toward the “**liberal**” wing of his church. Without a doubt, Gordon is a spiritual man with **profound insight** not only into the Word of God, but also into its practical implications for church life. His lectures usually offer brilliant **analyses of Christianity**, and they frequently point out “blind spots” characteristic of different Christian groups. Hardly anything seems to be good enough for his **sophisticated standards**. For instance, his criticism of certain evangelistic methods is often justified, and both his evangelical and charismatic friends (and opponents) would benefit from paying closer attention to his words. However, it is characteristic that Gordon only rarely suggests positive ways to improve the practices he criticizes. Furthermore, whenever evangelism does take place (red segment), he is usually **conspicuously absent**.

His criticisms would carry much more weight if he were actually part of the game. If he would admit the limitations of a **purely rational approach** and pay more attention to his heart (blue segment), he might even dare to leave his sometimes **lonely position**.



*The starting point of a “skeptical believer” such as Thomas. Their strength lies in the green area (wisdom); their weaknesses, in both the blue (power) and the red areas (commitment).*

consequently they miss the special empowerment that results. While we are not told why, it is noteworthy that Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection (John 20:24). On this occasion, aside from showing himself to his followers, Jesus foreshadowed the empowering they would receive from the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Thomas simply missed this important event.

#### **How Jesus dealt with Thomas**

It is characteristic of someone like Thomas to say, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (John 20:25). Now comes the most remarkable part of the story. Jesus did not react by criticizing Thomas for his weaknesses (“Doubting Thomas! I command you to repent!”). No, Jesus reacted differently. He started by responding to Thomas’ strength, by fulfilling his desire for proofs, and said, “Reach out your hand and put it into my side.” Only then did he say, “Stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27). Thus he revealed to Thomas an area of growth that was still awaiting him: “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

## Starting point 2: Martha

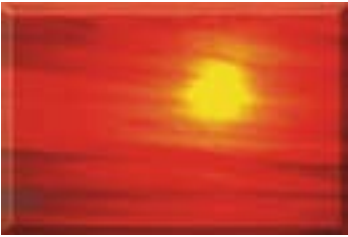
The starting point of the controlling believer is the red area (see diagram on page 25). Controlling Christians are usually not very receptive to teaching on spiritual gifts or wisdom. In their eyes, all of that is too theoretical. They want to get things done, and they are usually those on whom you can count.

A fine biblical example of this starting point is Martha. In Luke 10:38-42 we read that she opened her home to Jesus and, unlike her sister Mary, served him at the table. This is characteristic of people like her. Their strength is commitment. Without the unselfish dedication of the “Marthas” of this world, we would probably close most of our churches.

While the controlling believer is strong in commitment, his or her primary need is for growth in both power and wisdom.

### Martha's deficiencies

This attitude of service was Martha's great strength, and Jesus didn't criticize this characteristic at all. However, the episode quoted below demonstrates Martha's weak points quite clearly. “But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him (Jesus) and asked, ‘Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’” (Luke 10:40). In other words, she tried to manipulate her sister Mary so that she would become as active as herself. Like so many people who share this starting point, Martha didn't have a well-developed sense of the right timing (*kairos*), which would be a characteristic typical of a wise person (green segment).



### Example: Michael from Australia

I met Michael at a seminar on “The Threefold Art of Experiencing God.” During a coffee break he approached me and said, “Christian, what you teach sounds quite nice, but at the same time it is very theoretical. If something needs to be done, **I just do it!** I don't believe that all these reflections on gifts and wisdom will really get us anywhere. If the participants of this seminar were simply challenged to greater commitment in ministry, rather than filling in questionnaires and reflecting on their starting points, we would have achieved a lot.” Later on, I learned from his pastor that Michael actually practices what he preaches. Whenever something needs to be done, the **pastor can count on him**. At the same time, Michael tends to give church members who don't share his level of commitment a **guilty conscience**. If he is in charge of a ministry, he sometimes creates a negative atmosphere by **pushing** his fellow believers to work harder.

His ministry would be much more effective and at the same time he would experience greater joy, if he combined his **commitment to the Lord** both with times of personal spiritual renewal (blue segment) and with greater wisdom in dealing with fellow Christians (green segment).



*The starting point of a “controlling believer” such as Martha. Their strength lies in the red area (commitment); their weaknesses, in both the blue (power) and the green areas (wisdom).*

In John 12:3 we are told that, while Martha was serving at the table, Mary poured out a pint of expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet, so that the house was “filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” The actions of the two women are consistent with what we already know of them—Martha was busy serving; Mary was busy worshipping. The danger for Martha, of course, was that in all her activity she might miss occasions of spiritual anointing (blue segment).

#### **How Jesus dealt with Martha**

Jesus’ response to Martha started with an acknowledgment of her unselfish commitment: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things” (Luke 10:41). Without a doubt, Jesus appreciated this kind of ministry, as we can see by his reaction to other committed people. However, after he had said this, he added, “But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). With these words, Jesus didn’t disregard Martha’s service, but by defending Mary’s position he helped Martha discover an area in which she needed to grow.

Chapter 1:  
FoundationsStarting point 3:  
Mary

If Martha serves as an illustration of the controlling believer (who is most comfortable in the red segment), her sister, Mary, is the opposite. For people like Mary, only the blue segment matters (see diagram on page 27). No wonder they had difficulties with each other!

Whereas we read in John's record of this story that Mary poured a whole pint of pure nard on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (John 12:3), in Luke's narration, it is stressed that while Martha was serving, Mary simply "sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said" (Luke 10:39). Both behaviors fit well with people like Mary. They have a strongly developed sensitivity to the spiritual dimension (blue segment). They can drop everything and throw caution to the wind. They can become excessive. It's understandable that Judas criticized Mary for this: "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" (John 12:5). People like Mary don't care if they are confronted with such criticisms. They are driven by the inner conviction that they are spiritually correct. I understand why some people feel like they're going to go crazy when they have to deal with such people. While others are active, worried, and concerned, they just sit there "wasting" time and money! But this is exactly their strength.

While the spiritualizing believer is strong in power, his or her primary need is for growth in both wisdom and commitment.



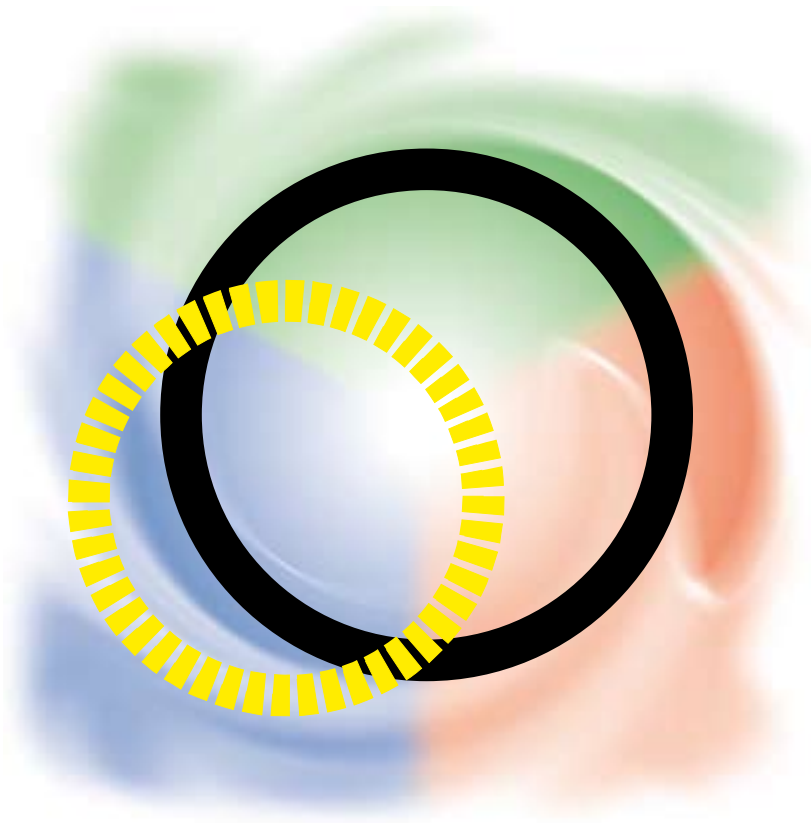
### Mary's deficiencies

It is somewhat difficult to criticize Mary's behavior, since Jesus clearly justified it. What, then, is the problem with "the spiri-

### Example: Lucía from Argentina

I've met Lucía at two different conferences. Both times she was involved in a powerful **ministry of intercession**, and I suspect that most of the participants could sense the difference it made when a meeting was upheld by **prayer warriors** like her. At the same time, Lucía gave some of the other co-workers the impression that they were "less spiritual" than herself, even if she never intended to communicate this. "Christian, **the only thing that we can do for church development is pray,**" she told me time and again. And I always replied, "Lucía, your prayer ministry is wonderful. But, according to God's will, prayer is definitely not the only thing that we can and should do." Despite my words, I had the impression that while listening to me she was really thinking, "As convincing as it might sound, what Christian is teaching about church development is **not what really matters.**"

To avoid misunderstanding, I must affirm that Lucía is a great woman and her ministry is **powerfully used by God**. I would not suggest that she withdraw one inch from her prayer ministry—quite the contrary! However, instead of presenting prayer (blue segment) as an alternative to both the "green" and the "red" dimensions, I would suggest that it is important for her to appreciate the spiritual relevance of all three dimensions of ministry.



*The starting point of a “spiritualizing believer” such as Mary. Their strength lies in the blue area (power); their weaknesses, in both the red (commitment) and the green areas (wisdom).*

tualizing believer”? There is nothing wrong with Mary’s behavior in this story; the specific situation clearly warranted it. However, there is a problem when spiritualizing believers make this sort of behavior a general pattern in their lives. They are *always* among those who sit around absorbing “spiritual things,” while leaving the practical implications of ministry (red segment), together with all reflection and planning (green segment), to others.

### **How Jesus dealt with Mary**

We shouldn’t forget that Judas’ criticism of Mary was not all wrong. When Jesus heard it, he first of all acknowledged the positive aspects of Mary’s apparently extreme position. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial,” he said, clearly foreshadowing the unique event that was to come (John 12:7). But then he went on to say, “You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me” (John 12:8). In other words, the time will come when you can—and should!—care for the poor again. Obviously, we cannot make Mary’s behavior in this specific situation a general pattern for ministry!

## Starting point 4: Moses

**M**oses serves as a terrific illustration of what I have labeled the “burned-out believer” (see diagram on page 29). Wisdom was certainly not his weakness. Acts 7:22 tells us that he had been “educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” and we can find traces of this throughout the whole Bible. Similarly, commitment was not an area of weakness for him. Anyone studying Moses’ life will be amazed by his deep level of dedication.

While the burned-out believer is strong in both wisdom and commitment, his or her primary need is for growth in power.



### Moses' deficiency

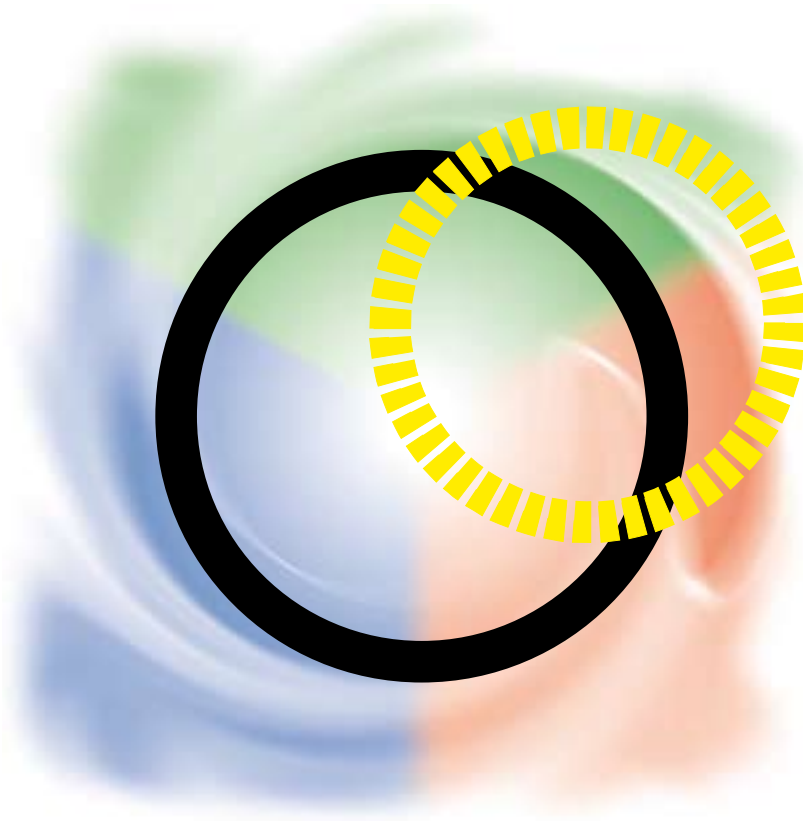
Nevertheless, in the Bible we find a number of instances indicating that Moses lacked power in different ways. I would like to cite three of these episodes because they reveal to us the wonderful way in which God dealt with this (admitted!) lack of power in Moses’ life.

The first episode is Moses’ call to a challenging task. He was supposed to go to Pharaoh and lead God’s people into liberty. Moses’ reaction to this calling was negative. He didn’t believe he had the strength for this task. “O Lord, I have never been eloquent,” he said. “I am slow of speech and tongue” (Exodus 4:10). How did God react to this lack of power? He sent Moses’ brother, Aaron, to speak to Pharaoh on Moses’ behalf. The second episode illustrating Moses’ lack of strength is the battle of the Israelites against the Amalekites. In Exodus 17:10-13 we read, “Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning,

### Example: Cathy from the United States

Without a doubt, Cathy is one of the **most devoted Christians** I’ve ever met. The number of responsibilities she carries, both in her local church and beyond, is incredible. On top of this, Cathy is an extremely **educated woman**, so each of her words carries a lot of weight. I enjoy interacting with her, and I am always astonished by what one person can **achieve for the kingdom of God**. One time I asked her, “Cathy, don’t you feel burned out right now?” Without hesitation, she answered affirmatively and added, “But isn’t that our job description as Christians, **burning out for the Lord**?” Cathy’s problem isn’t that she feels burned out at times—a lot of dedicated Christian workers go through those seasons—but that she makes the **“burn-out syndrome” her lifestyle**.

I have no doubt that, in the long run, she would be even more effective in ministry if she took more time to experience that in God’s eyes she, as a person, is **more important than all of her dedicated ministry**. It would also be beneficial for her to accept the fact that she doesn’t have to **do everything herself**. There are so many Christians like Cathy who could achieve much more if only they were empowered for ministry (blue segment).



*The starting point of a “burned-out believer” such as Moses. Their strengths lie both in the green (wisdom) and the red areas (commitment); their weakness, in the blue area (power).*

but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army.” The third episode is Jethro’s visit to Moses, as recorded in Exodus 18. There we learn that Moses served his people as judge from morning till evening. Jethro told him, “You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Exodus 18:18). He advised Moses to select capable people who would serve as judges over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, leaving only the difficult cases for Moses.

#### **How God dealt with Moses**

Again, it is noteworthy to see how God dealt with Moses’ obvious lack of power. In all three cases, he sent people who were strong where Moses was weak. In the first episode, this was Aaron; in the second, Aaron and Hur; and in the third, his father-in-law Jethro. In all three cases, the success of these “joint ventures” was remarkable.

## Starting point 5: Peter

I have chosen Peter as a biblical illustration of the “fanatical believer” (see diagram on page 31). People like him are not lacking commitment. They are ready to take risks for the Lord. Look at the episode that some Bibles have subtitled “Sinking Peter.” We should note that Peter was the only disciple who dared to leave the boat to meet

Jesus, who was walking on the water. “Lord, if it’s you,” he said, “tell me to come to you on the water” (Matthew 14:28). It is true that later he lost his faith and sank, but his risk-taking attitude remains remarkable. Thus, “Daring Peter” or “Risk-taking Peter” would be a far better subtitle for this story.

The same holds true for the famous episode which speaks about how Peter disowned Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75). Again, we shouldn’t forget that he was probably the only disciple who followed Jesus right into the courtyard, whereas all the others disappeared. What courage, and what love for the Lord!

When we consider the “blue segment,” we make similar discoveries. In the entire book of Acts, hardly another person’s ministry is accompanied by as many supernatural signs and wonders as Peter’s. He was clearly a man of both power and commitment.

### Peter’s deficiency

Wisdom (the green segment) doesn’t seem to be one of Peter’s strengths. When Jesus was arrested, it was Peter who

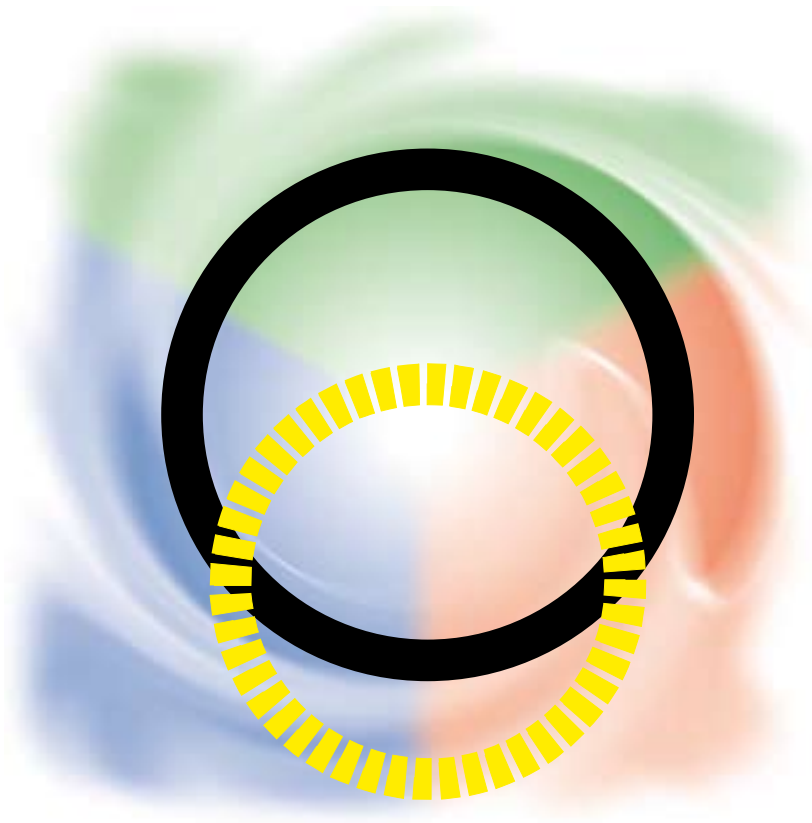
While the fanatical believer is strong in both power and commitment, his or her primary need is for growth in wisdom.



### Example: Sulastri from Indonesia

I have learned so much from Sulastri in terms of both **spiritual power and commitment to the Lord** that at first I thought her life would be an almost perfect representation of what Christian ministry should be. I could clearly sense that she didn’t minister in her own power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that she was simply **obedient** in doing this. But then I learned that in many instances Sulastri, with all her power and commitment, **lacked sensitivity toward others** and quite often didn’t demonstrate a well-developed sense of the right timing. Thus, she sometimes acted like **a bull in a china shop**. She had difficulty understanding that in spite of all of her wonderful activities, she could do a lot of harm. Her strength really wasn’t sitting down and reflecting on what she, or other Christians, should do in order to achieve a specific goal. The motto of her life was simply, **“Pray and obey.”**

But it is precisely this kind of self-reflection, together with the humility to learn from others (who might not even share her level of power and commitment), that are crucial for her to make further progress in her spiritual life. It is in the “green segment” of our diagram where she could find the key to even more effective ministry. Sulastri has so much to teach all of us, if only she could do it **more wisely**.



*The starting point of a “fanatical believer” such as Peter. Their strengths lie both in the blue (power) and the red areas (commitment); their weakness, in the green area (wisdom).*

tried to defend him by cutting off the right ear of the high priest’s servant (John 18:10-11). Peter’s motto, like many others who share his starting point, appears to be, “It’s better to do something wrong than to do nothing at all!” And thus it happens that a servant loses his ear. People like Peter have difficulty noticing how much harm their powerful commitment causes if it is not tempered by wisdom.

### **How Jesus dealt with Peter**

We all know the end of the story. Jesus told Peter, “No more of this!” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him (Luke 22:51). He saw the lack of wisdom, the lack of balance and the lack of diplomacy in Peter’s life, and yet Jesus told him, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

It is remarkable that Peter’s obedience and spiritual power seemed to be more important than his deficiency in wisdom for the leadership position Jesus had in mind. Jesus repeatedly gave Peter another chance, including opportunities to grow in wisdom. And in the book of Acts we find some hints that Peter made progress.

# Starting point 6: Jonah

One of the most beautiful character studies that the Bible offers is found in the small book of Jonah. There we find a classic description of the starting point that I have chosen to call “the detached believer” (see diagram on page 33). In this book, Jonah is clearly portrayed as a man of deep insights and wisdom. He knew from the outset how God would react to the disobedient people of Nineveh (cf. Jonah 4:2).

While the detached believer is strong in both power and wisdom, his or her primary need is for growth in commitment.

Throughout this book, we also learn of Jonah’s power. Whatever he did bore fruit. Having heard Jonah’s testimony, and especially after having thrown him overboard, the men on the ship “greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him” (Jonah 1:16). This was a direct consequence of Jonah’s ministry!

When he finally preached God’s message to the people of Nineveh, the result was remarkable. The people of Nineveh repented (Jonah 3:5). Now, it is true that Jonah didn’t like this outcome very much (Jonah 4:1), but it was the result of his extremely powerful ministry.

### Jonah's deficiency

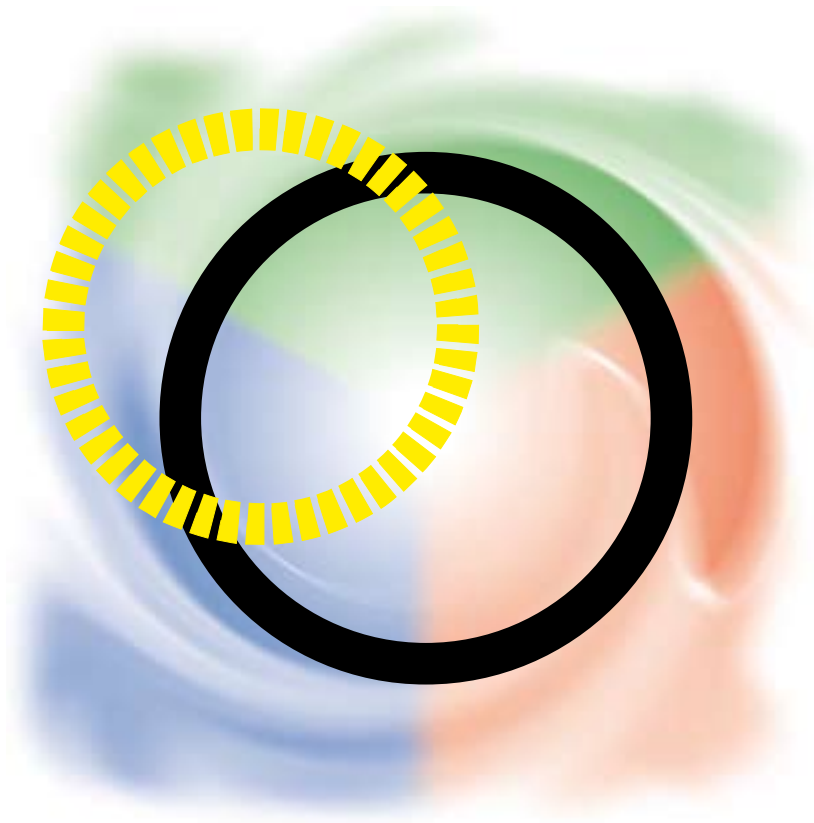
Jonah’s weak point isn’t difficult to identify. He lacked commitment. He was not willing to do what the Lord commanded him to do. He fled from God, and he fled from fulfilling God’s mission. Or better said, he *tried* to flee, since the Lord didn’t let him get away with it!



### Example: Ndoze from Namibia

I know Ndoze only through e-mail, but in almost all of his correspondence I find hints that he is a person full of both **spiritual power and wisdom**. But when it comes to follow-through, especially in the face of difficulties, there is still a lot for him to learn. I got in contact with Ndoze when he invited me to a conference in Africa. Even through his written words, I could sense that he was a man of spiritual power. He attached to his e-mail a paper describing the long-term strategy behind this conference, and I must admit that I have seldom read such an excellent, **well-thought-out** paper. All of it looked so marvelous that I was truly disappointed that I was unable to accept his invitation. Later on, however, I heard that the conference never took place, as is the case with so many things that Ndoze plans. Of course, he usually has a good explanation when this occurs, but it is remarkable how often this sort of thing happens in his life.

In Ndoze’s own surroundings, his fellow Christians view him rather critically. Yes, they can sense that he is a **visionary man of God** and that he has many **valuable insights** to offer, but they regard him as **too unreliable** to work with. If Ndoze could simply improve his level of self-discipline (red segment), both his power and wisdom would be released for the benefit of the body of Christ.



*The starting point of a “detached believer” such as Jonah. Their strengths lie both in the blue (power) and the green areas (wisdom); their weakness, in the red area (commitment).*

### **How God dealt with Jonah**

Anyone who wants to learn how God deals with disobedient people should carefully study the book of Jonah. God acted both lovingly—and drastically. He allowed Jonah to be thrown into the sea—and provided a fish to swallow him. He let Jonah “digest” matters for three days—and commanded the fish to vomit him back onto the land. Later when the sun was burning on Jonah’s head, God provided a vine to give him shade—and sent a worm that chewed the vine so that it withered. All of this sounds almost brutal. Why did God treat Jonah this way? Because of Jonah’s starting point. He was a man of extraordinary power and wisdom. How do you teach obedience to a person who knows the will of God and who has success in his or her ministry? God probably wouldn’t have treated a person from another starting point in the same way, but toward a man like Jonah, this treatment was quite loving.

Detached believers, watch out! The Lord might need to educate you in the school of hard knocks. Do you want to move nearer to the center? *Your way to this destination is “obedience.”*

Chapter 1:  
FoundationsYour personal  
change compass

**A**fter studying the six starting points, you probably already sense which of the examples resembles your own situation. The next four pages will help you collect further information about where your own starting point is with regard to the three dimensions of ministry. Once you have identified your personal starting point, the next steps you should take to experience further spiritual growth should be quite evident. Whatever your starting point may be, the goal of your journey is always to draw nearer to the center; in other words, closer to the triune God.

**Not a personality test**

When doing this exercise, please note that this is not a personality test. The change compass doesn't describe your God-given "character" or "personality type" (which is hard to change), but simply your present situation (which you can change).

Whatever your starting position might be, the goal of your journey is always to draw nearer to the center.



It could be that you identify different patterns of behavior in different areas of your life. For instance, when relating the change compass to your ministry involvement at church, you might come up with different results than if you were relating it to the context of your job. It is possible to relate this "test" to different contexts. However, when filling in the questionnaire, it is important to know which context you would like to "test," and to stick to it consistently throughout the whole exercise.

**Five practical steps**

Follow the five steps that you will find in the yellow boxes at the bottom of the next four pages. The result will be the identification of one (or possibly two) of the six starting points as your own. Pages 38-40 give you suggestions as to how these results might help you in working through the remaining chapters of this book. Enjoy the exercise!

**Step 1:**

	Column A	Column B	Column C
1	energetic 2	well-informed 1	active 0
2	passionate 1	rational 0	analytical 2
3	reluctant 2	reserved 1	demanding 0
4	spontaneous 1	reflective 2	stable 0
5	emotional 2	rigid 0	scrupulous 1
6	exuberant 0	broad-minded 2	devoted 1
7	self-denying 0	enlightened 2	dutiful 1

Look at the table on page 35. There you will find ten rows, each containing three adjectives. Indicate in each row which of these adjectives describes you *best* (2), *second best* (1), or *least* (0).

When doing this exercise, think primarily of your experiences throughout the past few months.