



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Courageous Leadership THE SUMMARY

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## Chapter 1: The Stakes of Leadership

I shouldn't have been surprised that behind the scenes of every prevailing ministry, I have discovered courageous, service-oriented leaders. Throughout history, whenever God was ready to begin a new work, he would select a potential leader for the assignment. In the Old Testament, he chose leaders like Moses, David, Nehemiah, and Esther. In the New Testament, he chose people such as Peter and Paul. In more recent times, when a wayward church community needed to be called back to its true heart and mission, God used leaders including Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley to be the initial catalysts for change.

Ten years ago, I sat in a little restaurant during my summer study break and wrote these words: *The local church is the hope of the world and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders.* For the first time, I realized that, from a human perspective, the outcome of the redemptive drama being played out on planet Earth will be determined by how well church leaders fulfill their callings. Many churches are filled with sincere, talented, godly people who would love to leverage their spiritual gifts in order to impact the world for Christ. The question is this: Will the men and women who have been entrusted with leadership gifts take their gifts seriously, develop them fully, and deploy them courageously so that the willing and gifted believers in their churches can work together to make a real difference in the world?

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

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Romans 12:8 tells those of us who have the gift of leadership that we need to sit up and take notice and we must “lead with diligence.” Why have we been given this command? Because the Church, the bride of Christ, upon which the eternal destiny of the world depends, will flourish or falter largely on the basis of how it is led. If you’re a leader, please reread the sentence above and let it sink into your consciousness. Also, please understand that I am not writing about leadership simply to highlight this particular gift. My ultimate concern is not leadership. For me, the bottom line is the Church as it is described in the second book of Acts. But I am absolutely convinced that the Church will never reach her full redemptive potential until men and women with the leadership gift step up and lead.

Scripture tells us exactly what will happen if leaders do what God has called and gifted them to do. The forces of darkness will be pushed back. The Evil One, who has had his way in the world for far too long, will be forced to give ground. And the Church will truly fulfill the redemptive purpose for which Christ called it into being.

When I think about the world we live in—a world where evil manifests itself in ways that defy imagination—I can’t help but commit myself with even greater fervor to the beautiful, powerful, vital Church of Jesus Christ. Where else would I even want to employ the leadership gifts God has graciously given me? The Church is the hope of the world!

### **Chapter 2: A Leader’s Most Potent Weapon: The Power of Vision**

Vision is at the very core of leadership. If you take vision away from a leader, you cut out his or her heart. Vision is the fuel that leaders run on. It’s the energy that creates action. It is the fire that ignites the passion of followers. It is the clear call that sustains focused effort year after year, and even decade after decade, as people offer consistent and sacrificial service to God.

When a church needs a God-honoring, kingdom-advancing, heart-thumping vision, it turns to its leaders.

It does this because God put in the leader’s arsenal the potent offensive weapon called vision into the leader. The goal of this chapter is to unravel the complexities of vision so that we as leaders can learn to unleash its power in our churches. This is how change in the world begins.

I have heard dozens of definitions of the word, and so have you. But my best shot at a crisp definition is this: Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion. When God finally brings clarity of vision to a leader’s life, everything changes. The dominoes start to fall, normally in a typical progression, as outlined below.

First, a leader *sees* the vision, that life-changing image of the future that makes his or her pulse quicken. Seeing the vision might be the result of reading Scripture or of hearing an exciting story of a transformed life. It might result from coming face-to-face with a need that grips the heart. It might even come as a leading directly from God. More likely, though, one sees the vision through witnessing or experiencing a work of God that is already being done by someone else. Seeing this form of ministry or service ignites an internal response that simply cannot be ignored.

Then, almost immediately, comes the *feeling* of the vision. Remember our working definition: Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion. We may wonder what makes a vision so powerful—it’s not just the picture of the future; it’s the energy and the passion it evokes deep in our hearts. This level of energy or passion must be experienced to be fully understood. Leaders are not the only ones who are energized by the passion of their vision; followers also thrive on it.

The next step in the progression is for leaders to *take responsibility* for the vision. They have to own it. Please don’t miss this step. If God has given you a kingdom vision, if you see it clearly and feel it deeply, you must take responsibility for it. You must give your life to it. That is why God made you a leader. That is your unique calling. That is what you and I and those like us will be held accountable for someday.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

After a leader receives and owns a vision, the next challenge is to communicate it to others. What good is a vision unless a leader can help others to see it? But how does a leader best communicate a vision? By embodying it, personifying it, and living it out. Every church, every team and every organization demands and deserves a “vision embodier,” someone whose life values and commitments personify the vision. They are the sort of person who, if cut, bleed the vision. Mother Teresa did this for her order of nuns. She lived in the slums and cradled the dying in her arms until her own death. If people wanted to know what her vision was all about, they only had to watch her for a day.

Your people need that kind of leadership from you. Willow Creek people need it from me. They have to see me embody the vision; they have to see me live it out, every day. Vision is the most potent weapon in a leader’s arsenal. It is the weapon that unleashes the power of the church.

### **Chapter 3: Getting-It-Done Leadership: Turning Vision into Action**

Some leaders believe that the key to getting results is simply to cast the vision again...and again...and again. They are convinced that if they just keep talking about the dream and keep focused on the dream and keep people thinking about, praying about, and pumped up about the dream, it will automatically happen. One bright morning, everybody will wake up and find the entire vision actualized before their eyes. Voila! Mission accomplished!

But accomplishing a vision requires more than just pep talks, slogans, emotional stories, and heart-tugging video clips. It’s taken me the better part of twenty-seven years to figure this out, but I’m clear about it now. There’s a huge difference between visionary leadership and getting-it-done leadership. Please note that I said *huge*. At a certain point, people need more than vision. They need a plan, a step-by-step explanation of how to move from vision to reality.

For years, I’ve been trying to help people understand the importance of the spiritual gift of leadership. My hope is that all leaders in the kingdom will commit themselves to fully developing their leadership potential. All leaders need to strive continually to lift their capacity to the next level, no matter how difficult that is. We need to be willing to move out of our comfort zones, to learn new skills and disciplines, and to submit to a process of retraining. I want to challenge all of us leaders to put ourselves on intense growth tracks, to read and reflect, to seek training, to look for mentors, and to begin a nonstop search for the best leadership models we can find. I am asking leaders to be humble enough to learn. I am asking all leaders to be courageous enough to apply best practices in appropriate, Spirit-anointed ways in whatever leadership arena God has assigned us.

Does this sound like it would be a bit intense? If you think it does, let’s take a look at how Jesus, the ultimate leader, took his leadership challenge. When he was only twelve years old he told his parents, “I must be about my Father’s business.” In other words: “Let the other kids play Nintendo and read comic books. I have a world to change. And it’s serious business.” I’m fascinated by the very fact that he used the word “business.”

Years later, when he formally launched his ministry, he had a clear vision. He had a three-year strategic plan that included the selection and development of twelve disciples. He had a well-planned evangelism strategy that moved from concentric circles outward: first Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and then the outermost parts of the earth. Jesus gave specific assignments to his followers. We might call them job descriptions. When his followers did their jobs well, he commended them, praised them, and rewarded them. When they didn’t, he confronted them and showed them how to do it correctly. Then he sent them out to do it better.

Jesus was not the least bit *laissez-faire* about building the kingdom. His passion for the lost and his love for the Church were so strong that he took his Father’s business

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

all the way to the cross. And I don't think Jesus is any more *laissez-faire* today than he was when he walked this earth in human flesh. I think he expects today's church leaders to put their best efforts into building prevailing churches. Of course, he said we would not have to do this alone. He promised to gift us, empower us, and walk beside us. But we, like Jesus, the greatest spiritual leader who ever walked the earth, need to be serious about "our Father's business." We need to remember that doing that requires prayer, spiritual discipline, dependence on the Holy Spirit—and best leadership practices. It's a both/and deal. We also need to accept that we will probably be required to pay a price for devoting our lives to building the kingdom of God. Jesus did.

Can I come right out and say it? It's time for church leaders to really lead. It's time for us to be about our Father's business with diligence, dependence, and get-it-done leadership.

### Chapter 4: Building a Kingdom Dream Team: Communities Close to a Leader's Heart

Having just turned fifty, I have recently spent a lot of time thinking about what is essential to me. I have come to realize that there are really only two things, besides my family, that really matter to me. First, I want to do God's bidding for the rest of my life. That is primary. But in addition to that, I want to do God's bidding in authentic community with people I love and who love me.

When these two essentials are realities, I have "life in all its fullness." Carrying people in my heart while we minister together—and being carried in their hearts as well—is what it means to be part of a "dream team." It's almost like enjoying a bit of heaven on earth.

The first step in building a dream team is to define the purpose of the team. This means define it with ruthless specificity. Forgive me for stating something so obvious, but sometimes it's the most obvious things that we miss.

Whenever pastors tell me they're going to put together a leadership team, my reflex is to ask a few clarifying questions: "What kind of leadership team? What will be its purpose? Will it be to help you with your preaching? Will it be to create church policy? Do you need it to discipline wayward church members? Is its purpose to buy property and build buildings?" I ask these questions because I know that these widely different tasks may very well require people with widely different gifts, skills, and expertise. Leaders must be painfully specific about the nature and purpose of the team. They must ask themselves this question: What do we want this particular team to accomplish?

The next step in building a dream team is to establish clear criteria for the selection of specific team members. What kind of person is needed to fill each particular position on the team? We need to look for certain characteristics and qualities in order of their importance.

When searching for someone to add to a volunteer team or paid staff position, I remind myself to look at a person's **character** first. By this, I mean that I need to have confidence in a person's walk with Jesus Christ. I need to know that they are committed to spiritual disciplines. I need to see evidence of honesty, teachability, humility, reliability, a healthy work ethic, and a willingness to be entreated.

My second selection criterion is **competence**. In this regard, I make no apologies for having high standards. I look for the highest level of competence I can find. I ask God to help me find someone whose spiritual gifts have been developed and refined over many years. The third "C" I look for is **chemistry**, a relational fit with me as well as with other team members. Ken Blanchard, coauthor of *The One-Minute Manager*, counseled me to never invite a person onto my team who does not have a positive emotional effect on me the minute he or she walks into my office.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

I initially thought that counsel was a bit extreme. “Come on, Ken,” I challenged him, “I’m not looking for a golfing buddy. I just need a capable person to work faithfully in our church.” That was many years ago. Today, I am a convert to the doctrine of chemistry. This is because so much of my time (except sermon preparation) is spent with the team. Nearly every moment of my working day, I’m sitting around a table with the elder team, the board of directors, the management team, the teaching team, the programming team, the WCA leadership team, or the international conference team. For hundreds of hours each year, I sit in small circles working on kingdom challenges with other people. There is no real way to say this diplomatically, but it helps if I really like being with those people! So if two job candidates have equal character and competence, I’ll give the nod to the person whose personality and temperament blends with me and with the other team members.

Once a leader defines the purpose of a team and recruits team members, he or she must ask the really big questions: What will it take for this team to reach its full potential? What kind of leader do I need to be for this to happen? I’ve never been impressed with the advice of those who suggest that teams can be self-directed or led by rotating leaders. I side strongly with those who believe that the most crucial factor in a team’s performance is the effectiveness of its clearly defined leader.

Each team needs a top-quality leader who will 1) keep the team focused on the mission; 2) make sure the right people with the right gifts and right talents are in the right positions; 3) maximize every team member’s contribution; 4) evenly distribute the load so that the morale stays high and burnout stays low; 5) facilitate communication so that all team members remain in the information loop; and 6) assess and raise the level of community within the team.

These are huge challenges. I think it’s extremely naïve to believe that teams can flourish without a focused leader pouring time and energy into achieving these goals.

I’m a major advocate of establishing BHAGs—Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals. But goals have to be more than big. They also have to be clear. The old saying is true: What gets measured gets done. Without clear goals, most teams flounder. They waste time, lose energy, get distracted, and eventually become demoralized.

### **Chapter 5: The Resource Challenge: The Test of a Leader’s Mettle**

Nothing tests the mettle of church leaders and members more than the resource challenge (the challenge of not having enough of something we need). Rather than looking for quick fixes, lottery wins, or Bill Gates bailouts, leaders must willingly, courageously, and expectantly accept the resource challenge. We must allow the pressures of scarcity to teach us all we can learn about God, our people, and ourselves.

Most leaders assume that everybody who comes to church knows God’s mind on financial matters. On the contrary, the truth is that many congregants are absolutely clueless regarding the basic principles of Christian financial management. Leaders and teachers need to educate their congregations before they can expect them to honor God with their money and eventually get excited about resourcing the church.

I strongly suggest that church leaders and teachers present a two- or three-week series on the biblical principles of money management every year. In the United States, January is the ideal time for this because that’s when most people are rethinking personal budgets. In other countries, there may be a more appropriate time of the year for such a series.

In these stewardship series, we need to explain that, according to the Bible, earning money is a good thing, while getting into excessive debt is a bad thing. We need to explain that Christ’s followers are called to live within their means, to give a minimum of ten percent of their earnings

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

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back to God's work in their local church, and to give sacrificially to the poor as the Spirit prompts them.

At Willow, we have concluded that there is no good reason to be secretive about finances, so we have an absolute open-book policy. Each year on Vision Night, I announce to the congregation the budget established by our board of directors. I use as many visual aids as possible to make it clear where we are as a church and where we are headed in the future. Then I allow time for questions and answers, and no question is off-limits. In addition, anybody can get a fully audited statement that explains where every dime given to Willow Creek Community Church has gone.

I am a fanatic about full financial disclosure because anything less than full disclosure tends to create suspicion. Nothing shuts off the resource faucet quicker than suspicion. If there is nothing to hide, why be secretive? Why not just lay it all out there? At Willow, there is not a single thing that we're ashamed of. There is nothing that we need to keep hidden. I strongly advise every church leader to operate this way.

Most people have heard about this one—the KISS Principle means: "Keep it Simple, Stupid." People at Willow need to understand just two sets of numbers. The first set is our budgeted weekly offering versus our actual weekly offering. Each week, we print the current budgeted and actual numbers in the weekly newsletter we distribute at our midweek services. That way every member can monitor exactly how we are doing. The second set of numbers that Willow people need to follow is associated with our year-end challenge. Each year as we approach Thanksgiving and Christmas, we present to the congregation the special needs of our inner-city partnerships and the international arm of the Willow Creek Association. We might also ask the congregation to give sacrificially toward additional property purchases or building programs. During this annual six-week challenge we present a specific financial goal, and each week we keep the congregation informed of our progress toward that goal. But we don't drag the

process out for months, and we break our backs to keep it simple.

I also apply the KISS Principle to financial reporting practices. If I get a board report or a spreadsheet from our finance department that I can't understand, I send it back, I remind them that I am a pastor, not a CPA, and I ask them to idiot-proof it for me. If I can't grasp it, how will I ever be able to inform our congregation about it? How will I make it through congregational Q&A times that often include financial inquiries? When it comes to finances, complexity kills.

Over the years, my bottom-line message to wealthy Christians has been that with a big net worth comes huge kingdom responsibilities. If they're open, I explain further what that means. Some (but not all) wealthy people have the spiritual gift of giving, but few understand the implications of that. I inform them that Scripture teaches that people with the spiritual gift of giving are challenged to earn as much money as they can, live frugally, and flow as much money as possible into God's work in this world. That's the essence of the spiritual gift of giving as described in Romans 12:8.

Leaders need to stand toe-to-toe with resourced people who have the gift of giving and say, "God gave you this gift for a reason. You're as accountable for the development and full utilization of that gift as I am for the gift God gave me."

One of the jobs of leaders is to help people with the spiritual gift of giving get into the game and understand that they are responsible to God for the "much they have been given." Every time I can help a rich young ruler break free from the tyranny of greed so that he or she can leverage resources for that which matters most, I feel like I've been used by God to do something very important. People who have been disciplined and challenged to use their gifts of giving can do serious kingdom good for the rest of their lives.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

People don't give to organizations or to other people. They give to visions. When leaders who understand this take the time to paint pictures of their visions for people and help them imagine the kingdom good that will result from their collective efforts, then people are free to release their resources joyfully. The general rule appears to be, the grander the vision, the greater the giving.

### **Chapter 6: Developing Emerging Leaders: When Leaders Are at Their Best**

Leadership development never happens accidentally. It only happens when some leader has a white-hot vision for it, when his or her pulse rate doubles at the very thought of pumping a steady stream of leaders into the organizational system. A leadership development plan has to address these three phases: 1) identifying emerging leaders, 2) investing in the development of emerging leaders, and 3) entrusting responsibility to emerging leaders.

The first quality a potential leader must always have is a natural ability to influence others. Even if they have no conscious intention of leading people, they automatically exert influence. I don't have to be in a group of people for long before I can identify the men and women who influence the rest of the group. It becomes apparent whose ideas capture the attention of others, whose suggestions become the marching orders, and whose wisdom is most respected. Leadership, at its core, is about influence. So I'm always looking for people who have the ability to influence their peers.

Many people with influence lack the character to use that influence in a constructive or Christian way. This is the second important quality in a potential leader. Once I spot someone with influence, I try to discern whether he or she has the honesty, humility, stability, teachability, and integrity to steward that influence well. Because I'm usually looking for church leaders, I want to see evidence of a sincere walk with God, submission to the Holy Spirit, and commitment to the authority of God's Word. When I meet

a person who appears to have both influence and solid character, I intensify my search for the remaining qualities.

The third quality essential to leaders is people skills. My definition of "people skills" includes sensitivity to the thoughts and the feelings of others, and the ability to listen—and I mean really listen—to the ideas of others. I'm looking for people who genuinely care about other people, who view others as more than a means to an end.

A potential leader must have the fourth essential quality of drive. By drive, I mean an orientation to action and comfort with taking initiative. People with drive are the kind of people who, when at restaurants, are the first to say, "Let's order. Let's get the show on the road."

The final quality is intelligence. When I say I look for intelligence, I don't necessarily mean that I look for high SAT scores or a sheepskin from an Ivy League university. What I look for in potential leaders is mental speed. I look for people with street smarts, with the kind of mental savvy required to take in large amounts of information, sift through it, consider all the options, and generally make the right decision. I also look for someone with an eager, curious mind—intellectual elasticity, I call it—who can learn and grow over the long haul.

These five leadership indicators—influence, character, relational skills, drive, and intelligence—do not form an exhaustive list. But they provide a good framework for an initial evaluation. When I find people with all or most of these qualities, I start figuring out ways to get these folks into my orbit so I can get to know them better and verify my initial observations. If I discover they have the stuff I'm looking for, I do my best to get them on a developmental track as soon as possible.

When we have identified emerging leaders, and when we have built into them, trained them, and adequately prepared them, then we must entrust these folks with real responsibilities. We must hand emerging leaders an

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

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important kingdom baton—not a little make-believe job or a low-stakes challenge—but something that will make their pulse quicken; something that will make them feel believed in, valued, and held in high esteem; something that will make them fall to their knees and cry out for God’s help; and something that will demand the best they have to offer.

The truth is that we leaders live for high-stake challenges! We crave the kind of kingdom goals that make us gasp and gulp. That’s not true of non-leaders; they generally prefer to keep challenge (and stress) levels low; that’s how God made them. But leaders want the kind of kingdom responsibilities that demand everything they’ve got.

Leaders, please understand this: You and I are at our leadership best when we provide challenging, soul-stirring kingdom opportunities for leaders-in-training; when we stand by these developing leaders and cheer them on; when we help them solve problems and pray for them; and when we coach them on to higher levels of effectiveness. That is leadership at its best.

### **Chapter 7: Discovering and Developing Your Own Leadership Style: The Key to High-Impact Leading**

Different leaders often lead with dramatically different styles. As I can discern it, they all have the spiritual gift of leadership, but they express that gift in varied ways. Additionally, certain leadership styles fit better than others with specific kingdom needs. I am increasingly convinced that highly effective leaders often have impact not only because they are highly gifted but also because their leadership styles mesh perfectly with the specific needs of their ministries. It follows, then, that discovering and developing unique leadership styles is another major key to leadership effectiveness.

*The visionary leadership style.* What distinguishes the visionary leader is that he or she has a crystal-olclear

picture in mind of what the future could hold. Such a leader casts powerful visions and has indefatigable enthusiasm for turning those visions into reality.

*The directional leadership style.* The directional style of leadership doesn’t get much press, but it is exceedingly important. The strength of this leader is his or her uncanny, God-given ability to choose the right path for an organization as it approaches a critical intersection.

*The strategic leadership style.* Strategic leaders have the God-given ability to take an exciting vision and break it down into a series of sequential, achievable steps. This gift of leadership allows an organization to march intentionally toward the actualization of its mission.

*The managing leadership style.* The managing leader salivates at the thought of bringing order out of chaos. He or she finds deep satisfaction in monitoring and fine-tuning a process, and he or she motivates team members by establishing appropriate mile markers on the road to the destination.

*The motivational leadership style.* Leaders with the motivational style are the modern-day Vince Lombardi. They have that God-given ability to keep their teammates fired up. They are on the constant lookout for “sagging shoulders and dull eyes,” and they move quickly to inject the right kind of inspiration into those who need it most.

*The shepherding leadership style.* The shepherding leader is a man or woman who builds a team slowly, loves team members deeply, nurtures them gently, supports them consistently, listens to them patiently, and prays for them diligently. This kind of leader draws team members into such a rich community experience that their hearts begin to overflow with good will that energizes them for achieving their mission.

*The team-building leadership style.* Team-builders have a supernatural insight into people that allows them to



# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

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successfully find and develop the right people with the right abilities, the right character, and the right chemistry with other team members. Good team-builders also know how to put these people in the right positions for the right reasons, thus freeing them to produce the right results.

*The entrepreneurial leadership style.* Entrepreneurial leaders may possess any of the other leadership styles, but what distinguishes these leaders from the others is that they function optimally in start-up mode. If these leaders can't regularly give birth to something new, they begin to lose energy.

*The reengineering leadership style.* Reengineering leaders are at their best in turn-around environments. These leaders are gifted by God to thrive on the challenge of taking a troubled situation—a team that has lost its vision, a ministry where people are in wrong positions, a department trying to move forward without a strategy—and turning it around.

*The bridge-building leadership style.* Bridge-building leaders make important contributions to large organizations such as parachurch ministries, denominations, and educational institutions because they have the unique ability to bring together a wide range of constituent groups under a single leadership umbrella. This enables a complex organization to stay focused on a single mission.

Here are my suggestions for meshing leadership styles with organizational needs in order to lead with high impact: 1) identify your leadership style or styles; 2) determine if your style fits your current leadership situation; 3) identify the leadership style of each member on your team, make sure each person is matched up with the right leadership need, and determine if there are leadership gaps on your team that need to be filled; and 4) commit yourself both to developing your strong leadership styles and growing in your weaker leadership styles.

I urge you to act on these suggestions. When leaders are optimally positioned so that their leadership strengths mesh perfectly with the specific needs of a church, or an organization, they can have huge impact. Under their leadership the troops can be mobilized, the mission can be achieved, and the kingdom can move forward like never before.

### **Chapter 8: A Leader's Sixth Sense: The Sources of Decision Making**

Let me give you my conclusion first, and then I'll unpack it. I believe that spiritually gifted leaders construct, over time, a value system and experience base that wisely informs each subsequent decision they make. As they diligently add to this personal database year after year, they automatically increase their leadership batting averages. So it's not some mysterious sixth sense or supernatural phenomenon that gives effective leaders unusual insight and wisdom. Rather, their ability to see what others miss is the fairly predictable result of embracing the right values and letting those values inform their perceptions of reality and the choices they make based on those perceptions.

Do you know the core convictions that inform your decision-making? When I was trying to get at the root of my core beliefs, I thought I had them right on the tip of my tongue. But I didn't. I had to put my feet up on my desk and journal and pray for several hours before I could unpack the deep convictions that inform my decision-making. Here are mine: 1) honor God in everything and he'll honor you, 2) people matter to God, and 3) the local church is the hope of the world.

It is quite possible I could dig up a fourth, fifth, or sixth belief if I kept the shovel going, but most leaders will do well to identify their top three core beliefs. But you must be careful of faulty belief systems. Ensure your convictions are biblical. If not, they may be hazardous to your decision-making health.

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

I have been somewhat surprised to discover a second data source influencing me. As I evaluated the decisions I have made, I was fascinated by how often my decisions were informed by what I knew other leaders I respected would do if they were facing that particular decision. But how do you gather a group like this? My recommendation to you would be to read often and widely and to try to spend time with other leaders as often as possible. This will expose you to people and principles that can gradually inform your daily decisions. Over time, God will help you identify the inner core of consultants who can best help you make decisions that honor him.

One of the advantages of experience is that it provides veteran leaders with a “pain file” of raw-edged memories. The lessons gathered in this file help leaders to discern the level of potential pain inherent in any new idea. If the level is too high, their danger sirens start blaring, and they know they have to pull the plug.

The Holy Spirit is, by far, the most valuable data source we have. Leadership training and mentoring are good. Honing our skills is admirable. Seeking wise counsel is beneficial. Developing our minds is essential. But ultimately we walk by faith, not by sight. There is a supernatural dimension to leadership that comes our way only when we listen carefully to the Spirit.

When a leader combines the promptings of the Holy Spirit with the other sources of decision-making data—core convictions, influencing mentors, and the lessons of pain—that leader will operate with ever-increasing levels of decision-making prowess. If you didn’t know better, you might even think that leader had a sixth sense!

### **Chapter 9: The Art of Self-Leadership: The 360-Degree Leader**

Recall the first five chapters of the Gospel of Mark. Do you remember Jesus’s pattern of intense ministry activity quickly followed by time set aside for reflection,

prayer, fasting, and solitude? Jesus repeated that pattern throughout his ministry. In our terms, Jesus was practicing the art of self-leadership. He knew he needed to go to a quiet place and recalibrate. He knew he needed to remind himself who he was and how much the Father loved him. Even Jesus needed to invest regularly in keeping his calling clear, avoiding mission drift, and keeping distraction, discouragement, and temptation at bay.

This is self-leadership. Nobody—and I mean nobody—can do this work for us. Every leader has to do this work alone, and it isn’t easy. In fact, Dee Hock claims that most leaders avoid it because it’s such tough work. We would rather try to inspire or control the behavior of others than face the rigorous work of self-reflection and inner growth.

Because I know what’s at stake, I now ask myself several self-leadership questions on a regular basis:

1. Is my calling sure?
2. Is my vision clear?
3. Is my passion hot?
4. Am I developing my gifts?
5. Is my character submitted to Christ?
6. Is my pride subdued?
7. Am I overcoming fear?
8. Are internal issues undermining my leadership?
9. Is my pace sustainable?
10. Is my love for God and people increasing?

How is your heart? If you stay on the track you are on, will your heart grow bigger as the ministry years go by? Or

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

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are your margins too thin? Are you running so fast that by the time you reach periodic finish lines you're a depleted wreck? Please face what you need to face. Change what you have to change. Experiment with life-management practices that will allow you to excel at leadership and excel at loving.

If reading this chapter has made you squirm, then read it again. Ask yourself the questions I asked in this chapter. Lay your calling, your vision, your passion, your gifts, your character, your pride, your fears, your interior issues, your pace, and your heart before the Spirit of God. Let God reveal the truth about your life. Then take whatever steps you need to take to become proficient at the single most important aspect of leadership: self-leadership.

### **Chapter 10: A Leader's Prayer: "God, Mold and Shape Me to My Full Leadership Potential"**

Some of the richest times I've spent with God have occurred when I've been alone on a boat. One day while I was anchored off the Lake Michigan shore, I began journaling some thoughts about my own leadership potential. I wrote, "God, I want to be a better leader than I am. I don't want to stand before you someday and have to admit that I squandered the opportunities you gave me. I want to develop my leadership skills to the peak of my potential. But I need your help. Please direct my growth and instruct me in the way I should go."

As I was writing this prayer, I felt led by the Holy Spirit to scroll through the lives of some of my favorite leaders in the Old and New Testaments. After reflecting on the lives of these diverse men and women, and identifying the praiseworthy components of their leadership, I began to pray that their strengths would find greater expression in my life.

I think it's time we all ask God for greater intensity. I'm not talking about frenetic busyness, but about an intelligent, Christ-honoring, Paul-like intensity. How about reaching

down deep and praying the words of Paul right now? Repeat them with leadership resolve. Say them until the words are cemented in your mind.

"I do not consider my life as dear unto myself. Only that I would achieve the mission that I received from the Lord."

"This one thing I do: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

"I will gladly spend and be spent for the sake of the church."

"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

"In a race there is only one winner. When I run a race I do so to win."

"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith."

"Oh God, make me like Paul. Give me his intensity so I will have the power of your Holy Spirit, strength in the middle of the battle and courage to endure."

May our prayers shape us, and may God's grace lift us to our full leadership potential.

### **Chapter 11: The Leader's Pathway: A Vital Walk with God**

Sacred pathways are like doors that open into a room where we can feel particularly close to God. Just as different leaders have many different personalities and combinations of gifts, so they have many different spiritual pathways. In this chapter, I want to discuss some of these, hoping that leaders will identify their own particular pathway, and in so doing revitalize their own walk with God.

*The Relational Pathway.* Have you ever noticed how difficult it is for some people to flourish in their walk with Christ

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

when they attempt to do so alone? But inject a strong dose of relationship—of connecting with other people—into their pursuit of God and watch what happens! Almost immediately these individuals begin to thrive spiritually. It's obvious. Their primary pathway to God is relational. When leaders with the relational pathway acknowledge it and lean into it, they begin to flourish spiritually in ways they never could have if they'd attempted to go it alone.

*The Intellectual Pathway.* People who thrive on the intellectual pathway are those whose minds must be fully engaged before they can make significant spiritual progress. These people can't have their morning devotions without two or three opened commentaries flanking their Bibles. They carry several intellectually stretching books with them wherever they go. They gravitate toward classes, seminars, and special events that will challenge their thinking. They do this because they know that their hearts will never fully engage until their minds are filled with truth.

*The Serving Pathway.* Some folks can't seem to catch their spiritual stride and feel consistently close to God unless they're quietly and consistently laboring in kingdom vineyards. When it comes to thinkers and doers, these people are the doers.

*The Contemplative Pathway.* Throughout church history, there have always been some Christians who feel like they're marching to a different drummer. For reasons they may not fully understand, these people are easily drained by relationships and activities. But they can spend almost unlimited time in solitude. Give them a Bible, a good piece of literature, a poem, or a journal, and they'll disappear for days.

*The Activist Pathway.* Unlike contemplatives, activists are at their best at a speed of Mach 2. They're happiest when white knuckled and gasping for breath. Because of

their wiring they need—actually they revel in—a highly challenging environment that pushes them to the absolute edge of their potential. It's when they're right on that edge that they feel closest to God.

*The Creation Pathway.* For these people, being in a natural environment dramatically increases their awareness of God. They often draw direct spiritual meaning from nature.

*The Worship Pathway.* I think David felt closest to God and most fully alive when he was worshiping. Many church leaders, like David, have this worship pathway. If they are wise, they will design a spiritual formation plan that allows them to delve often into the spirit of worship.

Now that you have some ideas about spiritual pathways, what can you do to move more consistently along your own pathway? First, you must identify your pathway. Second, you must lean into it, experiment with it, and try it on for size. As you do so, you will find yourself establishing and maintaining a deeper walk with God than you've ever known before. Third, you must appreciate all the pathways. Experiment once in a while with all the various pathways, even though certain ones are a stretch for you. I advise doing this because they all offer opportunity for growth. And finally, it's essential that you help others identify their pathways.

When those you lead begin to understand that there is at least one pathway that will enable them to relate to Christ more closely, they will thank you for a lifetime. And imagine the difference it would make if all our leadership teams and volunteers were led by people who were in vital union with Jesus Christ. Imagine the fruit that could be born, the creativity that could flow, and the power that could be unleashed if we were all regularly accessing the presence and power of God through the pathway that he's designed for us. The Church would truly become a force that the gates of hell could not hold back!

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

### **Chapter 12: Developing an Enduring Spirit: Staying the Course**

Christian leaders I have known who have faithfully worn the mantle of ministry for twenty, thirty, sometimes forty years, often attribute their longevity not to any particular things they did but to the many things they did not do. When I congratulate them for having accomplished so much, they are quick to remind me of all that they didn't accomplish. "Well," they say, "if you knew all the ministry opportunities I turned down, you probably wouldn't be congratulating me!"

But those leaders are some of the wisest leaders I know. They understand that the key to leadership survival is staying focused. They know that the most valuable asset leaders have is a powerful "No" muscle. And they know that this muscle needs to be flexed every time an opportunity, no matter how noble the cause, threatens to lure them from the task God has assigned to them. They have learned how to say, "No, that's not my calling. That's not my assignment. I'm sure heaven has instructed someone to do that, but it's not me."

If you talk to leaders who are no longer in the game, a surprising number of them will sheepishly admit, "I should have taken more time off. I should have shared the preaching load. I should have developed teams to help me. I should have asked for a raise. I should have gotten more training. I should have modified my daily schedule. I should have found a mentor. I should have gotten into an accountability group. I should have had some Christian counseling. I should have taken up golf."

When I ask leaders who have disqualified themselves from ministry why they didn't make changes that would have made their life more sustainable, the most frequent answer is, "I didn't have the guts. I couldn't muster the courage. I didn't want to ruffle anyone's feathers. I knew it would send the Nielsen ratings down. I was afraid people would think I wasn't committed or that I wasn't willing to suffer or sacrifice. I didn't want them thinking I wasn't a team player."

When I ask those same people what they would do differently if they had the chance, I hear the same response every time: "I would examine my life and change whatever needed changing to increase the odds of sustainability. Then I would let the chips fall where they may. I probably would have displeased some people and taken some heat. But at least I'd still be in the ministry today."

I have learned over the years that I am not strong enough to face the rigors of church work alone. In addition to the support of my wife and kids, I need the support of close friends. I need a small circle of trusted brothers and sisters with whom I can discuss temptations lest I fall to them. I need a few safe people with whom I can process feelings of frustration so that I don't become emotionally toxic. I need a few people in my life who will reflect grace back to me when I have fouled up and feel unusable.

Heroic Christian leaders throughout redemptive history have always looked at the difficulty of their short-term struggles against the backdrop of eternity. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For the light, momentary afflictions that we bear are producing in us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." In this passage, Paul is suggesting that, when the difficulties of life appear overwhelming, we need to think more like pilots than like sailors. We need to look at the waves from above them rather than within them. That is what it means to look at life from an eternal perspective.

### **Chapter 13: Refusing God Nothing: The Surrendered Spirit of the Christ-Centered Leader**

When you study the life of Mother Teresa, there is no doubt that God's "radar wand" searched and found a heart so fully committed to him that it likely lit up the display screen like it had never been lit up before.

After reading Mother Teresa's vows—and there were dozens of them that she voluntarily instituted—I began

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

to see why God raised her up and entrusted her with a level of influence that few Christian leaders have ever known. God's radar spotted what I call her "carte blanche yieldedness"—her openness to saying yes, her willingness to refuse him nothing, her insistence on doing his bidding promptly—and as God stared at the young woman wholly sold out to him, he said, "That life I will leverage for good!"

I frequently meet leaders who question why they aren't leading a "bigger deal." Truth be known, they are more obsessed with wanting more to lead than with wanting more of God. In the quiet of their own souls, they secretly wish that God would agree to carte blanche submission with their plans—for bigness, for power, for influence—instead of expecting them to defer to him.

I came away from my research of Mother Teresa's life and started to get serious about whole new levels of carte blanche submission in my life, about my private vows, about my little practices, and about my fidelities and sacrifices to God. My head was cleared all over again about what it means to want more of God instead of wanting more to lead. The awareness I have gained from my study of this single life is something for which I'll be grateful the rest of my life.

Too many local church leaders I meet are secretly wondering how much longer they'll have to hang onto their calling before they can just let go. They're worried and weary and worn down to the nub. Escapist thoughts overtake them, and more than anything, they want out.

Based on my research of Mother Teresa, my recommendation is this: Serve in your calling for as long as it takes for God to work his will through you. It may be days. It may be months. Perhaps it may even be years. Only God knows the duration, but this much is obvious: When we outlast the opposition, out-pray the problems, and wear down those who stand in our way, a sort of relentlessness is birthed in our spirits. And it is relentlessness on God's behalf that gets rewarded by heaven's smile.

The radar wand in heaven is still active today. God continues to look for yielded hearts, for followers of Christ who say, "I will refuse you nothing. I will do your bidding without delay." We leaders are almost always in the position of asking people to decide things. It's part of the leader's job, bringing people to a point where they're ready to decide things that they will thank you for the rest of their life for helping them decide. Leaders never shrink back from putting that challenge—that decision point—out there, and given the stakes in play, I won't shrink back now.

You and I have one shot and one shot only to make a unique contribution toward God's kingdom-building work. Casting powerful visions, building kingdom dream teams, raising required funds, and rewarding key players for a job well done are crucial and nonnegotiable achievements in the life of a leader. But it is only the truly courageous leader who dares wave that white flag of surrender. As 2 Chronicles 16:9 promises, it is only the truly courageous leader who leads with full strength from God and who is set up to have extraordinary impact on the earth. I trust that's the type of leader we both want to be.

### **The Pastor's Perspective**

If you are serious about becoming a more effective leader, Bill Hybels is someone you should be listening to. I read *Courageous Leadership* when it first came out, and again for this summary. Both times I was encouraged and challenged in significant ways. Every chapter has insights worth taking the time to think about.

This time around I was struck by two particular things. The first had to do with vision, and how it comes. Hybels says that vision most often comes from seeing what God is doing somewhere else, or through someone else, and that stirs something in us. I've found that to be true, but I must confess that I sometimes resist that. I find myself thinking that I should get my vision "directly from God," that I don't want to just copy someone else. The truth is, I don't want to copy someone else, but being inspired by someone else's

# LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

## Courageous Leadership

---

work isn't the same thing as copying. Often God uses other people to stir us, teach us, encourage us, or envision us. Who cares how he gives it, as long as he does? No matter where it comes from, as long as it burns in our soul, it's good, and we need to embrace it.

With that comes the question of how we communicate vision. As Hybels says, the best way to communicate vision is, by far, to embody it. Nothing else compares. That is so challenging! It is far easier to talk about vision than to live it. Long ago, I learned that when it comes to ministry, we reproduce who we are. Whatever we truly want to see in our churches, we have to pursue it in our own lives. It doesn't matter what it is—prayer, evangelism, justice, healthy relationships, or other things, it has to be something our people can see in our lives. That adds moral authority to our words.

Again, on the topic of vision, Hybels says, "At a certain point people need more than vision. They need a plan, a step-by-step explanation of how to move from vision to reality." For me, that part is much harder than just having a vision. But that is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to actually getting things done. I've found that it's essential for me to pull other people into the planning process if I'm going to do it well. I can easily oversimplify things or not think them through thoroughly, resulting in ineffective plans being made. I need to get people around me who complement me if I am going to turn vision into reality.

While all of that is important, I was most touched by the example of Mother Teresa and her complete submission to God. It challenged me to do some honest soul-searching. I ask myself, "Am I fully yielded to God, or are there areas I am holding back on or compromising in?" Ultimately, that is the most important leadership question anyone can answer. If our leadership is going to have an eternal impact, we need to be fully submitted to God. Everything starts there.

Here's my question: what are the things that hinder you from being fully submitted? For me, I find that the enemy is busyness. That keeps me from spending enough quality time with God, and without that I quickly start operating in my own strength and doing my own thing. What gets in your way? And how do you deal with it? Post [here](#) and let's learn from each another.