

Courageous Leadership

By Bill Hybels

Summary by Mark R. Elliott*

Introduction:

“In the early years of my ministry my boldness and decisiveness were not matched by equal measures of wisdom and sensitivity, so I quickly compiled a list of leadership mistakes worthy of a page in Guinness. But by God’s grace, I was surrounded by some loving people who were willing to continue the adventure with me while I learned” (pg. 11).

Q: Bill’s boldness and decisiveness had to be balanced with wisdom and sensitivity. As you look at your early days in ministry what were areas of strength and weakness for you?

Q: How have you permitted God’s grace to provide for those weaknesses?

Chapter One: The Stakes of Leadership

1. Bill opens the chapter with a personal story about going to Ground Zero in New York City ten days after the 911 attacks. One of his reactions was to cry out, “No Way! There’s no way evil can run this deep.” But it did. As he reflected in that moment words that he had “repeated ten thousand times before” came back to mind. This time “they cut with the flash of urgency. The local church is the hope of the world. The local church is the hope of the world.” A few paragraphs later he mused, “Will the Church of Jesus Christ be a light bright enough to shine in such darkness?” (pgs. 15-17)

Q: Do you agree with Bill that the local church is the hope of the world? Why or why not?

Q: If people in your community were asked about the brightness of your church’s lamp stand, how would they respond?

2. Bill then relates a story of waiting to board an airplane when everyone in the gate area was shocked into silence by the sound and fury of an older brother’s brutal attack on his younger brother. Bill stepped up and called out “Where are these kid’s parents?” When no one responded and the older boy grabbed the little guy by the hair and started pounding his face into the tile floor, Bill stepped in to separate them. Afterwards he said, “I was prompted by the Spirit to consider what might change the trajectory of this kid’s life.” In reflecting on the many solutions that are out there (government programs and laws; businesses to provide good jobs; better education; self-help programs; advanced psychological techniques; etc.) Bill concluded the “only power [that] exists on this sorry planet that can to that..[is] the power of the love of Jesus Christ.”

Q: Do you agree that “THE ONLY” real solution to the world’s ills is the power of the love of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

3. He goes on to state, “nothing comes close...if the church is working right. But that’s the big if. In the mid-eighties, when I began to travel more, I couldn’t ignore the gap that existed between churches that were living out their purposes and flourishing—reaching seekers, growing up strong believers, putting their arms around the poor, lifting broken lives—and those that seemed to be on the verge of failure, going through empty motions that appeared to impact no one...everywhere I went, I found myself asking, ‘What makes the difference? What is the key to the vitality of thriving churches?’” He goes on to state that from his perspective it isn’t location, denomination, facilities, great preaching, etc. His ultimate conclusion is, “What flourishing churches have in common is that they are led by people who possess and deploy the spiritual gift of leadership.” Bill’s summary statement for the chapter is, “The local church is the hope of the world and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders” (pgs. 24-27).

Q: As you reflect on the key differences between flourishing and struggling churches, what are some of the answers you have discovered?

Q: What do you think of Bill’s conclusion that THE difference is leadership?

Q: If leadership is the key, and if God has called you to serve in a position of leadership, how important is it for you to grow and develop in the area of your leadership skills?

Chapter Two: A Leader’s Most Potent Weapon—*The Power of Vision*

1. “Proverbs 29:18 says, ‘Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained.’ They can’t focus, can’t reach their goal, can’t follow their dream. An older translation says, ‘Without vision, the people perish.’ I’ve seen it with my own eyes—without vision, people lose the vitality that makes them feel alive...my best shot at a crisp definition is this: Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion” (31-32).

Q: How important would you say vision is for you to be an effective pastor of a local church?

Q: In a sentence or two, state the vision you have for your church:

2. Bill wrote, “When I talk to a leader who is hesitant or unclear about his or her vision, I ask the following questions:
 - Have you yielded yourself fully enough to God?
 - Have you asked God to unveil His vision for your life, or are you asking Him to bless a plan that you’ve already come up with? We must come to God with empty hands and an open heart and ask, ‘What is Your vision for my life?’
 - Have you fasted?
 - Have you prayed?
 - Have you been quiet and waited on God in solitude?

- Have you cleaned up sinful patterns in your life?
- Have you weeded out the distractions and ambient noise that would keep you from hearing what God is trying to say to you?
- Have you read avidly? Have you traveled widely? Have you visited a variety of ministries around the world? Have you exposed yourself to the kaleidoscope of visions that God has given to others so that you can be inspired by the variety of options? If not, get out there! See what God is doing! I would suggest that today this step can be accomplished via the internet when you come to it with a mind that is open to the infinite diversity that God has created. I am not talking about theological diversity, but in the variety of ways Biblical principles are applied in a multi-cultural world” (pgs. 37-38).

Q: Take a few minutes and prayerfully reflect on the list. Which steps have you taken? Which ones do you still need to take?

3. Bill reminds us that, “Vision leaks. Most leaders think that if they fill people with vision once, they’ll stay full forever. But that’s just not true. Vision leaks, even out of our best people. The demands of everyday life gradually cause their minds to grow fuzzy, their commitment to wane, and their hearts to grow cold. Effective leaders are always monitoring vision leakage. They stand ready to recast the vision whenever necessary. Most leaders, frankly, don’t cast the vision enough. They blame followers for faltering commitment, not realizing that they have faltered in their role of vision caster” (pg. 44).

Q: How often do you preach a “vision sermon,” or re-cast vision with your leadership team?

4. Bill closed the chapter by pointing out four key things that good vision casting does for the church. They are:
 - 1) Vision increases energy and moves people into action.
 - 2) Vision increases ownership.
 - 3) Vision provides focus.
 - 4) Vision smooths leadership succession—without being morbid, allow me to mention just one final payoff of painting a clear vision for the church; it reduces the trauma of leadership succession. I won’t be the senior pastor of Willow Creek forever. The human death rate still hovers around a hundred percent, and I doubt that I will be an exception to that statistic. Neither will you. So, we both need to understand that one of the greatest gifts we leaders can give our churches is a clear, God-honoring vision that will outlast us” (pgs. 45-49).

Q: To what degree do you agree with Bill about the benefits of a clear, compelling vision?

Q: His final point relates to leadership transition. Even if you are young and even if you have just arrived at your ministry position, describe the difference it would make for your church if all you do is cast “your personal vision” for a church rather than casting “God’s vision” for the specific church where you are serving.

Chapter Three: Getting-It-Done Leadership—Turning Vision into Action

1. “There is one thing even more exciting than clarifying and casting a God-honoring vision: achieving the vision. Forgive me if that seems elementary, but I run across an alarming number of leaders who would rather cast vision than roll up their sleeves and attempt, with the Spirit’s power, to achieve it! ...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” (pg. 51-55).

Q: Describe the impact of a leader who is long on vision and short on carry-through.

Q: As you honestly evaluate your leadership style, how well do you cast vision?

Q: How well have you developed your strategy and equipped your people to fulfill that vision?

2. Bill relates how at one point he felt, “We have a refined vision. We have clear goals and goal champions. We have rising levels of energy, determination, and faith. What more could we as leaders do?” When he realized they still weren’t getting the job done, he realized the answer to his question “What more could we do,” was “a lot more” (pg. 60). In the following pages, he described the painful process of getting “everyone” on the same page. What he described is the challenge of ALIGNMENT. Alignment can best be described as everyone’s compass is pointing in the same direction. Or everyone’s watch is synchronized to the exact same time—down to the second.

Q: How aligned is your leadership team with the vision, goals, and objectives that have been set for your church?

3. Bill relates the following story: “I recently attended a funeral in a church I had visited nearly thirty years ago...From what I could see, little had changed in thirty years. According to the bulletin...there was still one Sunday morning service, where 175 people filled about two thirds of the available seating in that sanctuary. I can’t tell you how it grieved me to realize that there are approximately 10,000 more people in the community immediately surrounding that church than there were thirty years ago...These good people, and hundreds of thousands of others like them in churches all over the world, have never been led. They’ve been preached to and taught. They’ve been fellowshiped and Bible-studied. They’ve taken courses on prayer and evangelism. But with no one to inspire them, to mobilize them, and to coordinate their efforts, their desire to make a difference for Christ has been completely frustrated...Hebrews 13:17 reminds church leaders that we ‘must give an account’ for what we do with our leadership gifts” (66-68).

Q: What is the current trajectory of your church? Is it growing, staying the same, or declining?

Q: As you look at your community, is it growing, staying the same, or declining? By looking at those two factors, how effective is your church today at reaching your community?

Q: If the spiritual and numerical growth of your church members is a measure of your leadership effectiveness, just how effectively are you utilizing your leadership gifts?

4. “I think Jesus 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 have 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” (pgs. 71-72).

Q: How well do you balance prayer, spiritual discipline, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and growing in your leadership skills?

Q: Which of these four areas needs the most attention in your life?

Chapter Four: Building a Kingdom Dream Team—*Communities Close to a Leader’s Heart*

1. “Let me share what I look for in prospective team members at Willow Creek Community Church...My selection process is based on ‘Three C’s’: first character, then competence, and finally chemistry with me and with the rest of the team...Character first. By this I mean that I need to have confidence in a person’s walk with Jesus Christ. I need to see evidence of honesty, teachability, humility, reliability, a healthy work ethic, and a willingness to be entreated. I didn’t always place character above competence, but I do now. I have learned that in church work an occasional lapse in competence can be accepted. But lapses in character create problems with far-reaching implications...In my early days of leadership, I was extremely patient in regard to slips of character, hoping against hope that ‘things would just get better.’ Now I know that usually doesn’t happen. The leader must take action—the sooner, the better” (pg. 81-83).

Q: What do you think of Bill’s “Three C’s?”

Q: Would you agree that of the three, character is the most important? Why or why not?

Q: Do you currently have anyone on your leadership team that has “character issues?”

2. “Occasionally I’m asked where I find such great people to hire. My answer might be surprising. Almost seventy-five percent of our leaders have come right out of Willow...Our experience has been that even when we hire very carefully from outside, our batting average is less than fifty percent when it comes to creating an ideal, long-term working relationship. But when we hire from inside...that percentage jumps dramatically. The lesson is obvious: hire from within when-ever you can” (pgs. 85-86). Let me pull out one of my soap boxes and suggest that we incorrectly interpret Jesus statement, “The harvest is plentiful, but the

laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers for the harvest field.” Too often we view it as a prayer asking God send us mature, gifted leaders from someone else’s church. I believe that is a total misunderstanding of the passage. Jesus made the statement twice. Once in Matthew 9:38 when he sent out the twelve and again in Luke 10:2 when He sent out the 72. In each case He was telling His disciples, as you are going, pray that God will lead you to men and women who you can disciple and who you can equip so that they can join you in the harvest. The exhortation to pray brings with it the responsibility to evangelize and disciple our own harvest field.

Q: How often have you prayed to God that He would send you mature, equipped disciples who can help you in your church?

Q: How intentional are you in raising up leaders from your own church?

3. A leader must reward teams for work well done. Some church leaders are squeamish about rewarding those who work effectively. But Jesus was not vague about the concept of rewards. He often promised devoted followers great reward ‘in this life and the next’” (pg. 91).

Q: Describe the last time you rewarded a team member or church member for a job well done.

Q: Name at least one person in your church who is deserving of recognition. Then think, how can I celebrate their accomplishment in a positive and encouraging manner this coming Sunday?

Chapter Five: The Resource Challenge—*The Test of a Leader’s Mettle*

1. “Of all the challenges of leadership, the one I was least prepared for is what I have come to call ‘The Resource Challenge.’ I was to learn the hard way that unless I was willing to become the CRR (Chief Resource Raiser) our new church would be short lived. It would starve to death from lack of funding...My romance with the notion of building an Acts 2 church had blinded me to the harsh realities of funding one...

Theologian R. C. Sproul once asked me how much ministry I thought I could do for a hundred bucks. I assumed he was hoping for some deep theological response, but before I could think of one he answered the question himself. ‘You can do about a hundred dollars’ worth.’ He was simply making the point that a fruitful ministry requires resources...

Be as theological as you want to be, but the church will never reach her full redemptive potential until a river of financial resources starts flowing in her direction. And like it or not, it is the leader’s job to create and to manage it wisely. The sooner a leader realizes that the better” (pgs. 93-98).

Q: What do you think of Bill’s claim that if you are the pastor of a local church, YOU have the responsibility to be the CRR (Chief Resource Raiser)?

Q: If you disagree with Bill's statement, whose responsibility is it?

Q: As CRR every pastor needs to understand that when it comes to resource allocation, "God ain't dumb." If a leader hasn't been a good steward of what God has already provided (both personally and for the church), why would any leader think God would give them more resources to mismanage?

2. In the balance of the chapter Bill provides principles that fall into three basic categories: Basic Resource Truths, Principles of Raising and Allocating Resources based upon these Basic Resource Truths, and Guidelines for Resourcing a Staff. Bill begins with the following resource truths:

- God is the Ultimate Resource Supplier
- Under the Right Circumstances, People Love to Give.
- Funding Ministry Proves the Character of a Leader Like No Other Challenge—"I believe there are tremendous spiritual benefits associated with having to face financial challenges...Nothing tests the mettle of church leaders and members more than the resource challenge...We must allow the pressures of scarcity to teach us all we can learn about God, about our people, and about ourselves" (pgs. 98-104)

Q: How does your understanding of scripture and your personal experiences affirm the above Basic Resource Truths?

Q: Do you agree with Bill that there are spiritual benefits to facing financial challenges? Why or why not?

3. He then lists five Principles of Raising and Allocating Resources built upon the above basic truths. The first one is the Resources and the Education Principle—"I strongly suggest that church leaders and teachers present a two or three-week series on the biblical principles of money management every year" (pg. 105).

Q: Describe what your church does in the area of stewardship education.

Q: Are there specific areas where you could do more to educate and encourage people in the area of biblical stewardship?

4. The second one is the Resources and the Information Principle—After describing a significant time of financial challenge, Bill shares that at the close of a Sunday service he announced, "I can no longer handle the financial pressures of this church. I have to get away to think this over, and I'm not sure when I'm coming back. Something has to change because we're going under financially and it doesn't seem like anyone cares but me." He continues the story by sharing that, "Within seconds I was surrounded by at least thirty people who were all saying the same thing: 'We didn't know. Why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you let us help? We love this church. We want to be part of the solution...'. People want to know. They deserve to know. They can't help unless they know. From that day forward I have chosen to lay everything out in front of our people, and I do mean everything" (pgs. 107-108)

The third one is the Resources and the Kiss Principle—“People at Willow need to understand just two sets of numbers. The first set is our budgeted weekly offering versus our actual weekly offering...The second set...is associated with our year-end challenge (annual missions offering)...When it comes to finances, complexity kills” (pgs 108-109)

Q: How well does your church communicate its financial needs?

Q: Do you provide your church with a simple and clear financial statement, so they know where the money comes from and where it is spent?

Q: Beyond the weekly offering, how many special offerings does your church promote on a monthly basis? An annual basis? What do you think about Bill’s “Kiss Principle” where they promote only two offerings: weekly offering and annual global missions offering?

5. The fourth one is the Resources and the Principle of Strategic Discipling—“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 discipled and challenged to use their gifts of giving can do serious kingdom good for the rest of their lives” (pg. 111).

#5 Resources and the Vision Principle —“People don’t give to organizations or to other people. They give to visions...And generally, the grander the vision, the greater the giving” (pgs. 112-113).

Q: Which of these last two principles do you find most challenging to you personally? Why?

6. Bill concludes the chapter with the following four Guidelines for Resourcing a Staff
#1 The Fair Exchange Principle—“In Luke 10:7 Jesus teaches that a laborer is worthy of his hire” (pg. 114).

#2 The Unmuzzled Ox Guidelines—“In Deuteronomy 25:4, God says, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain...’ Give staff members the tools they need to do what you’re asking them to do” (pg. 115).

#3 The Double Honor Guideline—“In I Timothy 5:17, Paul instructs the church to give double honor to those who lead and teach well. In today’s parlance that means, ‘Bless the socks off your key players. Find out what would thrill their hearts, and then turn over heaven and earth to bless them with it’” (pg. 117).

#4 The Wisdom Guideline—“Be as wise as serpents, and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16)...This guideline challenges everybody engaged in the salary discussion to exercise sober-mindedness and old-fashioned wisdom. It means carefully assessing all the variables related to the pastor’s salary: What is the size of the congregation? How large is the staff? What is the scope of responsibility? How many years of faithful service have been rendered?

Has the pastor shown consistent improvement in preaching and leading? Are there special family needs? The list could go on” (pgs. 117-118).

Q: If you are a senior pastor of a multi-staff church, how would you rate yourself on each of the above areas?

Q: If you are a bi-vocational pastor, or the sole ministry staff member of your church, I would suggest you give the above list to the chairman of your finance committee.

Chapter Six: Developing Emerging Leaders—When Leaders Are at Their Best

1. When Bill meets with other church leaders in a small group setting, he often asks, “When are leaders at their best?” After providing time for their responses, he will chime in, “I think leaders are at their very best when they are raising up leaders around them. Or put another way, leaders are at their best when they are creating a leadership culture...leadership development never happens accidentally...Before we developed a clear vision for leadership development [at Willow], we fell into the trap that catches many churches, the trap of urgent demands. For years, almost all of our efforts went into meeting the immediate challenge of the next service, the next outreach event, the next extension effort for the poor, the next building program. We rarely paused long enough to wonder about the future leaders. *How will we identify them? Who will develop them? Will they be prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow?*” (pgs. 121-123).

Q: When do you think a leader is at his best?

Q: As you look at your own leadership development activities, how much of your time and energy is caught up in “the trap of meeting urgent demands?”

Q: What are you doing to identify potential leaders, and how are you developing them?

2. Like the previous chapter, the balance of the chapter falls into three well outlined segments: the first talks about broad themes related to leadership development; the second provides a list of the character qualities Bill looks for in emerging leaders; and final segment provides a three step process for developing your own leadership plan. He begins with three simple realities about how you became a leader that should be used as you look for future leaders:
 - Someone spotted our potential
 - Someone invested in us
 - Someone trusted us with responsibility

Q: Reflect on the above three statements and list the individuals who identified, invested, and trusted in your “potential.”

Q: Name at least one person you currently believe has potential.

Q: List at least one person in whom you are intentionally investing.

Q: Who are you currently trusting with a significant leadership responsibility that a year ago was not in any leadership position?

3. Bill then lists the following five character qualities he looks for in an emerging leader:

- Influence
- Character
- People skills
- Drive
- Intelligence

He adds, these five do not form an exhaustive list, but they provide a good framework for an initial evaluation.

Q: List the qualities you look for in an emerging leader.

4. The final segment of the chapter lists three steps to developing your own plan.

Phase #1: Draw up your own top-five quality list.

Phase #2: Invest in emerging leaders—it takes a leader to develop a leader and leaders learn best from other leaders.

Phase #3: Entrust emerging leaders with responsibility.

Q: As you reflect on the content of this chapter and our Biblical responsibility to “make disciples,” what similarities and differences do you see between the two processes?

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

1. Bill opens the chapter by referencing the book *A Certain Trumpet* by Garry Wills and then listing a variety of the leadership styles Wills describes in his book. Bill mentions ten:

- 1) The Visionary Leadership Style—Those who see a crystal clear picture of the future and are able to cast powerful vision for it along with having an indefatigable enthusiasm for turning those visions into reality.
- 2) The Directional Leadership Style—Those who have an uncanny, God-given ability to choose the right path for an organization as it approaches a critical intersection.
- 3) The Strategic Leadership Style—People who have the God-given ability to take an exciting vision and break it down into a series of sequential, achievable steps.
- 4) The Managing Leadership Style—Those who have the ability to organize people, processes, and resources to achieve a mission.
- 5) The Motivational Leadership Style—People who have the God-given ability to keep their team-mates fired up.
- 6) The Shepherding Leadership Style—Those with the ability to build a team slowly, love team members deeply, nurture them gently, support them consistently, listen to them patiently, and pray for them diligently.
- 7) The Team-Building Leadership Style—They have the supernatural insight into people that allows them to successfully find and develop the right people with the right abilities, the right character, and the right chemistry with other team members.

- 8) The Entrepreneurial Leadership Style—These leaders function optimally in start-up mode. If these leaders can't regularly give birth to something new they begin to lose energy.
- 9) The Reengineering Leadership Style—Those who are gifted by God to thrive on the challenge of taking a troubled situation...and turning it around.
- 10) The Bridge-Building Leadership Style—People who have the unique ability to bring together under a single leadership umbrella a wide range of constituent groups, enabling a complex organization to stay focused on a single mission (pgs 141-156).

Activity: See if you can put a name of someone you know to each of the above leadership styles.

Q: Which of the above leadership styles have you used?

Q: Which of the above leadership styles best describes your primary leadership style?

2. Bill states that “there are some leadership styles without which an organization cannot survive...a visionary leader who can communicate a clear vision in a compelling way...a workable strategy. If there's nobody on your team who can put together a step-by-step plan for turning vision into reality, then you had better find a strategic leader willing to join you or hire a consultant who can assist you...you may think your team can function without someone contributing motivational or shepherding strengths, but think again. Every team needs someone who is gifted in lifting the human spirit” (pgs 157-158).

Q: As you think about the four leadership gifts Bill mentioned (visionary, strategic, motivational, and shepherding) and evaluate yourself and your leadership team, are there voids?

Q: If there are voids in your church leadership team, prayerfully consider individuals in your church you could enlist or in whom you could invest so they could fill the gaps?

Q: Following a time of directed prayer, what additional specific steps can you take to enlist or equip those individuals?

3. Bill closes the chapter with a section he calls Discovering and Developing Your Leadership Style. In it he describes the following four step process:
 - 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.
 - 4) Commit yourself both to developing your strong leadership styles and growing in your weaker leadership styles (157-159).

Q: If you do step one and two and you determine that your leadership style(s) are not a match for your current ministry position, what would you do next?

Activity: Take time to seriously consider each of the four steps for yourself. Then encourage each of your leadership team members to do the same thing. Finally, take time as a team to discuss how God has put your team together and what additional pieces might be needed.

Chapter Eight: A Leader's Sixth Sense—*The Sources of Decision Making*

In this chapter, Bill discusses four data sources he relies on when he makes decisions. They are:

1. *What are my bedrock beliefs?* He lists his top three—I honor God in everything I do, knowing if I do He will honor me; People matter to God; and The local church is the hope of the world.
2. *What would other leaders do?* Here he talks about four specific areas: risk-assessment; performance evaluation; excellence—knowing that excellence honors God and inspires people; and morale—stating that congregations around the world are suffering from “motivation malnourishment.”
3. *What's in my pain file and the pain file of other leaders?* “One of the advantages of experience is that it provides veteran leaders with a ‘pain file’ of raw-edged memories... Proverbs 12:20 says, ‘Whoever walks with wise people will be wise.’ ...it’s important to get together with other leaders and ask, ‘What’s working for you? What’s not? Where did you get whacked? How badly?’ The reason I have never tried to hide my ministry mistakes is that I hope other leaders will learn from my frequent foul-ups and spare their people the pain I have caused Willow.”
4. *What is the Holy Spirit telling me?* Bill closes the chapter with the following questions:
 - Is there enough quietness in your life for you to hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit?
 - Do you have the guts to carry out promptings, even though you might not understand them fully, and even though your team might question your wisdom?
 - Are you willing to walk by faith?
 - Will you commit yourself to allowing the Spirit to fully inform your decision-making?

Q: Take a few minutes to reflect on the decisions you have made in the past few weeks. What data points did you rely on to make those decisions?

Activity: Compare and contrast them with those Bill identified in his decision making process.

Chapter Nine: The Art of Self-Leadership—*The 360-Degree Leader*

1. Bill relates a personal pilgrimage that is worth reading and internalizing. “Not long ago I read an article that seriously messed with my mind. Acclaimed leadership expert Dee Hock challenged leaders to calculate how much time and energy they invested in...leading people under their care, leading people over them, leading people laterally, and leading themselves...His recommendation? ‘It is management of self that should occupy 50 percent of our time and the best of our ability.’ ...I was stunned. Did he really mean this? That we should devote 50 percent of our time to self-leadership...His suggested percentages bothered

me so much I couldn't finish the article. I tucked it away in my desk drawer to give his ideas a few hours to simmer in my mind.

While they simmered I read an article by Daniel Goleman, the author of the best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*. Since the release of that book, Goleman has spent much of his time analyzing why a small percentage of leaders develop to their fullest potential while most leaders hit a plateau far beneath what one might expect from them. His conclusion? The difference has to do with (you guessed it) self-leadership. He calls it 'emotional self-control.' According to Goleman, this form of self-control is exhibited by leaders when they persevere in leadership despite overwhelming opposition or discouragement; when they refuse to give up during times of crisis; when they manage to hold ego at bay; and when they stay focused on their mission rather than being distracted by other peoples' agendas. Goleman contends that exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because they 'know their strengths, their limits, and their weaknesses.' As I read Goleman's corroborating data, I thought, *Maybe Dee Hock's percentages aren't all that absurd!*

Recall the first five chapters of Mark's Gospel. Do you remember Jesus' pattern of intense ministry activity quickly followed by time set aside for reflection, prayer, fasting, and solitude? 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. And nobody—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 because it's such tough work most leaders avoid it. We would rather try to inspire or control the behavior of others than face the rigorous work of self-reflection and inner growth...**

I'll never forget the day three wise advisors came to me on behalf of the church. They said, 'Bill, there were two eras during the first twenty years of Willow Creek's history when, by your own admission, you were not at your leadership best: Once in the late seventies and again in the early nineties. The data shows that Willow Creek paid dearly for your leadership fumble. It cost all of us more than you'll ever know.'

Then they said words I'll never forget: 'The best gift you can give the people you lead here at Willow is a healthy, energized, fully surrendered, and focused self. And no one can make that happen in your life except you. It's up to you to make the right choices so you can be at your best.' While they were talking the Holy Spirit was saying, 'They're right, Bill. They're right'" (pgs. 183-185).

Q: What do you think about Dee Hock's claim that you should spend 50% of your time on self-leadership?

Q: How would you compare the term self-leadership with the Biblical concept of self-discipline?

Q: What percentage of your time and energy do you spend on self-discipline vs trying to exhort others to be disciplined?

2. In the balance of the chapter, Bill lists ten self-leadership questions that he asks himself on a regular basis. They are:
- 1) Is my calling sure? On a regular basis, I ask, ‘God are you still calling me to be the pastor of Willow Creek and to help churches around the world?’
 - 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 interior issues undermining my leadership?
 - 9) Is my pace sustainable?
 - 10) Is my love for God and people increasing? (pgs. 186-197)

Q: Review the questions above. For which ones are your answers clear, crisp, and affirming of God’s leadership?

Q: For which questions are your answers iffy?

Q: What do you think God is saying to you today about the area of self-leadership / self-discipline?

Chapter Ten: A Leader’s Prayer—“God, Mold and Shape Me to My Full Leadership Potential”

This chapter highlights the strengths of several biblical characters in the form of a prayer that we might be more like those individuals in key leadership skill areas. Leaders and Bill’s prayers are:

- David—“O God, give me David’s optimism. I need David’s capacity to perceive what might happen when you are in the mix.”
- Jonathan—“God, give me Jonathan’s capacity to love.”
- Joseph—“God give me Joseph’s personal holiness.”
- Joshua—“God give me Joshua’s decisiveness.”
- Esther—“Oh God, give me Esther’s courage.”
- Solomon—“Oh God, if you would just grant me a portion of Solomon’s wisdom.”
- Jeremiah—“God, give me the emotional authenticity of Jeremiah.”
- Nehemiah—“God, may I never forget how important parties are. Like Nehemiah, help me remember to celebrate.”
- Peter—“God, make me the kind of leader who knows how important it is to take initiative.”
- Paul—“God give me Paul’s intensity.”

Q: Which of these prayers do you utter most often?

Q: Which of these prayers do you most need to lift before God today?

Chapter Eleven: The Leader's Pathway—A Vital Walk with God

1. The chapter begins with the question, “How important is the supernatural component of leadership, the God part?” He answers the question by pointing us to I Corinthians 13 and John 15:5 and the obvious answer that apart from God we can do nothing. He then states, “I meet church leaders all over the world who admit privately, in hushed tones, that they have never been able to establish and sustain a close, consistent, vital walk with Jesus Christ.” He continued, “Then I came across a book called *Sacred Pathways*, written by Gary Thomas... 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 a number of these pathways, hoping that leaders will identify their own particular pathway, and in so doing revitalize their own walk with God” (pgs. 215-217). Bill mentions the following:

- The Relational Pathway—for these people solitude feels like solitary confinement.
- The Intellectual Pathway—these people's minds must be fully engaged before they can make significant spiritual progress.
- The Serving Pathway—these people feel consistently close to God when they're quietly and consistently laboring in kingdom vineyards.
- The Contemplative Pathway—these people are easily drained by relationships and activities, but they can spend almost unlimited time in solitude.
- The Activist Pathway—these people are at their best at a speed of Mach 2. They're happiest when white knuckled and gasping for breath.
- The Creation Pathway—these people tend to grow best and relate to God most closely when they're surrounded by nature.
- The Worship Pathway—these people find their way to God during times of worship.

Q: How would you compare and contrast pathways to God and spiritual disciplines?

Q: Which pathway is your preferred way to connect with God?

2. Bill closes the chapter with four steps to help us be more consistent as we walk on our personal pathway to God. They are:
- 1) Identify our pathway.
 - 2) Lean into our preferred pathway.
 - 3) Appreciate all the pathways.
 - 4) Help others identify their pathways.

Chapter Twelve: Developing an Enduring Spirit—Staying the Course

1. “If you could ask your single most pressing question and with a wave of a wand walk away with a solid answer—what would our question be?” That's how I recently started a mentoring session with five highly effective senior pastors. I was surprised by their response...the

single most pressing issue for all of these pastors related to enduring...If the speed in your life has accelerated to the point that the thrill of serving Christ has been replaced by a sense of impending doom, then join the crowd (pgs 231-233).

Q: What single pressing question would you love to have answered?

Q: Are there days and times when you are concerned about your ability to sustain your current pace and whether or not you will be able to persevere to the end?

2. In the balance of the chapter, Bill lays out four courses all leaders should take in the graduate school of endurance. They are:
 - 1) *First Course: Make Your Calling Sure and Stay Focused*—“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 assigned to them.”
 - 2) *Second Course: Enduring by Developing the Courage to Change*—“The curriculum for this class is based on Paul’s words in I Timothy 4:16, ‘Pay attention to yourself, and then to your teaching.’ Here’s my paraphrase of this verse: ‘Examine yourself and examine your life. Then change whatever you can change that will lighten your load and help you prevail in your calling.’”
 - 3) *Third Course: Enduring by Discovering Safe People*—“Even Jesus, the most resilient leader who ever lived, said to a small group of friends, ‘My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Would some of you please stay with me? Would you be with me? Would you help me?’ (Matthew 26:38, my paraphrase). Jesus was freely admitting his need for safe people.
 - 4) *The Final Class: Enduring with an Eternal Perspective*—“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 II Corinthians 4:17, ‘For the light, momentary afflictions that we bear are producing in us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison’” (pgs. 234-251).

Q: Which of the courses would you be able to teach, and why?

Q: Which course should you enroll in today, and why?

Chapter Thirteen: Refusing God Nothing—The Surrendered Spirit of the Christ-Centered Leader

1. “Second Chronicles 16:9 says, ‘For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.’ Every time I read that verse, I think of a huge radar wand rotating slowly in the heavens. The wand constantly scans the hearts of all six billion people on the planet to see whose hearts are fully committed to God, and every so often God walks past the display panel to see if there are any images lighting up the screen. The text says that when such a heart is found, God’s strength and power come upon that person, and suddenly he or she is capable of creating extraordinary impact on the earth” (pg. 256)

Action: Describe a time when you think your life made a blip on God’s radar screen.

2. In this final chapter, Bill uses the life of Mother Teresa as an example of someone who refused God nothing. He states, “God’s radar spotted what I call her ‘carte blanche yieldedness’—her proneness 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!’”...In contrast Bill writes, “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 yieldedness with their plans—for bigness, for power, for influence—instead of expecting them to defer to Him” (pgs. 258-259).

Q: As you let God’s Holy Spirit speak to your spirit and illuminate the truth of where you are today, is there more carte blanche yieldedness to God or is there more of a desire for God to yield to your desires?

Q: As Christian leaders, it is imperative that with each passing year we have more and more carte blanche yieldedness to God. As you bare your soul before God, can you honestly say that is true of your life?

Q: If you are struggling with the right answer to the above questions, let me encourage you to find a mature brother or sister in Christ (someone of your same gender) and begin to develop an accountable mentoring relationship with them.

Epilogue

In the final paragraph of the book Bill states, “You are the only one who can fight for your development as a leader, so fight! And fight without apology for going wherever you need to go, doing whatever you need to do, talking to whomever you need to talk to, and reading whatever you need to read so that your ‘work will abound,’ as I Corinthians 15:58 says. So that, in the final assessment, your labor will not be in vain. Lean into your God-given calling to become not just a better leader, but a courageous leader—a leader who goes to every imaginable length to ensure that God was not crazy when He entrusted the future of the local church to fallible ones like us” (pg. 275).

*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to

find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.