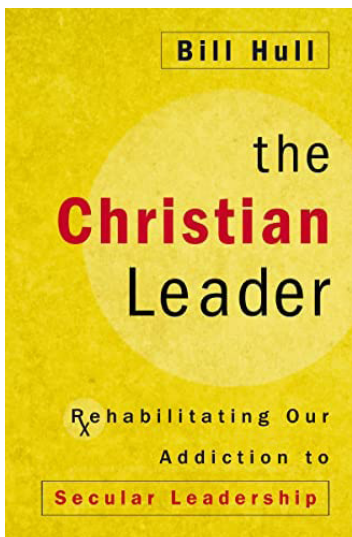


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The Christian Leader

THE SUMMARY

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Introduction

Beside my desk, on my desk, and on the bookshelves that surround me are more than seventy-five books on leadership. Over the last year I have read them, scribbled in their margins, underlined passages, and typed what I liked into my research notes. I am not even counting the hundreds of biographies of leaders I have read over the years. I have attended so many seminars on leadership that I can't remember them all. I have taken the leadership profile assessments, been through the charts, the graphs, and all the "twenty-six ways to be a leader" type of stuff.

Most leadership literature talks about a "right kind" of leadership personality. You know the type: big-picture visionaries who serve others and get the best out of people. They suck all the oxygen out of a room when they enter, and their big smiles reveal their white teeth. They are exciting speakers who move their followers to tears or laughter, as desired.

The question that has nagged me is this: *Did Jesus fit the successful leadership profile?* From everything I know about him, he didn't. And I wonder if he intends or expects any of us to fit the profile. I am writing this book because I believe we need to change how the church views Christian leadership.

This is not a book about improving Christian organizations; it is about changing how Christians lead. It is about how rehabilitated leaders change everything they touch. Most contemporary Christians believe that being noticed in the secular and Christian press is critical to success. It is exciting to be noticed, and

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it is normal to direct future behavior toward getting more notice. After several successful forays into this method of doing what works and getting rewarded, we are hooked.

This pattern of doing what works and getting rewarded is the enemy of Christian leadership. It thrives on making Christian work impersonal and exploitive. It serves the leader rather than those the leader leads. I propose that we need a different style of leadership—one patterned after Jesus. We need to learn to influence others out of our character, for that is what Jesus did. He taught us that the key to world revolution is to be yourself in the normal and common parts of life. He could have completed his mission living in your house, driving your car, married to your spouse, working at your office, and raising your kids, because leadership comes down to character.

Many who aspire to leadership are looking for the right circumstances so they can lead. Many in positions of leadership find it difficult to lead because of obstacles, such as lack of funds, a lack of authority, or confusion about methods. Jesus faced all of these—and more—yet he accomplished his mission.

Jesus influenced others because of *who he was*, not because he was well known or a person of power or because he had mastered a set of skills or implemented an effective leadership strategy. I am calling for the rehabilitation of the Christian leader.

CHAPTER ONE: The Rehabilitation of Christian Leaders

Rehabilitate your thinking about Jesus

Rehabilitation for Christian leaders begins with a commitment to do more than acknowledge Jesus' uniqueness; it is when they rearrange their lives around his practices.

The “real world,” as it often is called, does not take Jesus seriously as a leader. Most people think of him as a mystic or teacher of ethics. They consider him a religious leader of the same ilk as Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, or Buddha—someone who attempts to make the world a better place, who inspires people to seek the better angels in our nature and offer some hope for the next life. For many people, Jesus is the kind of leader they pat on the head and say, “You are good for people; we all need a little help.” They may call upon Jesus for assistance, for wisdom, or for an extra boost, but they don’t look to him to solve the world financial crisis. If you want to know quantum physics, Einstein is your man; if you are concerned with origins, Darwin or Gould is the ticket. Jesus is for covering all your bets, to give you someone to talk to as the plane starts rolling toward takeoff.

Clearly, it is not the non-Christian world alone that needs to be convinced that Jesus is competent as a world-class leader. Many Christians think that Jesus is qualified to help them in their spiritual lives but question whether he understands or would even bother to take an interest in the rest of their lives, whether in a courtroom or office or kitchen. The question for the church is this: Are we going to settle for marginalization and allow Jesus to live in the margins with us?

The church is in trouble. This is obvious from the primary way we gauge spiritual interest: church attendance. Yes, many people say they are “spiritual” but not “religious.” What this means, however, is that they want to be good but don’t want to submit to authority, so they use the word *spiritual*, which means nothing.

The problem may be approached in many ways, but I believe the fix begins with leadership. Christian leaders must be convinced that following the ways and means of Jesus is superior to, and in the long run more effective than,

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attractive secular models. The rehabilitation process will require repentance, a conscious turning away from trust in the pragmatism of what “works” to a commitment to learn how to relate to others as Jesus did. If Christian leaders can be rehabilitated to recognize that Jesus is a relevant model in character and conduct for living in the real world, there is hope.

The challenge for the Christian leader is to find the same balance Jesus found. He had enough ambition to carry out his mission and enough humility to stay in submission to his Father.

Perhaps you are wondering whether it will make a difference if we as Christian leaders change our thoughts and behavior about how to lead. The answer is determined by our goal. If by rehabilitated leaders we mean rehabilitated pastors, then the objective is narrowed to local congregations. The answer would be *yes*—pastors with new ways of thinking and behaving can change the ethos of their congregations. In fact, pastors are the single best hope for setting into motion the movement that will spur the church to accomplish what it should: to make disciples of all people.

The return of Christ will trigger the kind of actions that will truly change the world into paradise. In the meantime, Christ’s followers are charged to be disciples, to make other disciples, to love one another, and to love the world—that is all we need to do. The church’s calling is to send a transformed people into the living spaces of society and to establish a presence: the presence of Christ in every facet of a community.

Some things by nature can be pushed but not pulled, like keys on a keyboard. Other things can be pulled but not pushed, which would include most people. Leaders cannot push people into world revolution, but we can pull them into it by our example. The determining factor is whether we model Jesus’ style of leadership. When those leaders say, “Follow me,” people will do so because they see leaders they want to follow.

CHAPTER TWO: What Makes a Leader Happy?

Rehabilitate your motivation.

Jesus was happy when his followers experienced joy and meaning.

One day it struck me that my first responsibility as a leader was to be a good example. My actions and the environment I created as a leader affected those in my church, both employees and church members. After all, how they treated their families when they went home could be influenced by what they experienced during the day. I was beginning to see that as a Christian leader my task was to help others do Christian things, whether they recognized them as Christian or not. Being a good example was not something I could manufacture. People around me would know if I was authentic. I needed to become the kind of person who would actually *be* what I wanted others to be.

Henri Nouwen’s writings gave me a pathway for how I could begin to lead out of my character, out of who I was. We need to move from relevance to prayer, from the spectacular to the ordinary, and from leading to being led.

Being relevant is a big temptation in a leader’s life. People expect leaders to be up-to-date, even ahead of their time. Being relevant is particularly dangerous for younger leaders who are hip and full of new ideas. When leaders with charisma and talent rise fast, they find themselves surrounded by a spiritual entourage that enables them and can keep them suspended in spiritual adolescence. This explains why it is common to find people over fifty who still throw temper tantrums and treat those around them with disdain. This kind of behavior is bad enough when seen in a young leader who suddenly comes into money and fame, but it is heartbreaking to see in leaders as they grow older. The list is long of people who were ruined by money, fame, and the need to be relevant.

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To be relevant, a Christian leader must be able to communicate with others so that they can find God, appreciate his beauty, and experience the life he has planned for us. But Christian leaders shouldn't make relevance their goal. To chase after relevance is to chase the wind; relevance and fame keep giving us the slip. The skeptical reader might think, *Ah, leaders who are not relevant and don't speak to the culture are the ones who want to escape to a life of prayer.*

Like most driven leaders, I've been tempted by relevance. Nothing will test your faith more than to pray and then sit back and wait for God to act.

The temptation to be spectacular is ever present. I read last evening that people were scrambling to get tickets to hear a well-known pastor speak. I was surprised to be thinking, *No one scrambles for tickets to hear me speak. When am I ever going to get over this fading hope that I'm going to "make it"?*

Fame and popularity are fun. Like a roller-coaster ride, they give us a rush. But we can't live on adrenaline nor is God calling us to live in the limelight. Yes, we should do what we are gifted and called to do in the body of Christ, but we find the deepest level of satisfaction in ordinary service to others. The truth is that, while it is great to be well known, it is much better to be loved. To be loved is tangible and concrete. A happy leader is based on a happy person. Who we are in the ordinary moments reveals whether Christ is the real thing in us.

Power will always be a temptation for leaders. But leadership is actually action taken for the benefit of another person. Good leaders do not control people; we serve and inspire them. The best leaders are also the best followers. They have learned submission, vulnerability, humility, and the power of fitting into a community. The greatest Christian leaders are those whose primary focus is following Christ.

When Christian leaders relinquish control to God, it leads to happiness, because God determines the outcomes of our work as well as the level of recognition. There is great freedom in not trying to orchestrate how people respond to our actions. Once the ball has left the bowler's hand, there is nothing left to do.

CHAPTER THREE: Making a Dent in the World

Rehabilitate your idea of how you make your mark.

Jesus was most effective when he was himself in the ordinary circumstances of life.

It is currently fashionable to say, "Make a dent in the universe." However, I can't think of anything more confusing to a leader than to know how to do that. Second in degree of difficulty is connecting one's efforts to results. Is a leader required to be exhausted at all times? There seems to be confusion about how hard a leader ought to work, how much a leader should plan, and how thoroughly a leader should strategize. The answer is to learn about yourself and work in a way congruent with how God made you.

For Christian leaders, knowing our motivation means seeking God in prayer and hearing from him at a deep level. When we hear God's voice and do his will, Christlikeness is built in us. The more we listen and hear from God, the more Christlike our character becomes. Hearing and obeying God's voice becomes a way of life and our hearts are nourished by our closeness.

Josephus, the first century military leader and historian, sought to have an impact on others. But he was the consummate opportunist. He thought of his own life and welfare as the ultimate good. He left a mark, all right. It is

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one of selfishness and empty conceit. He turned on his own people, both in the siege of Jotapata and later when he represented Roman interests during the siege of Jerusalem. In both cases, he was duplicitous. He proved not to be a trustworthy man.

Dallas Willard, philosopher and writer : “A number of years ago I made a commitment to not try to make anything happen.” Dallas wrote lectures and books, but his commitment was not to attempt to create interest in his work—“My commitment is to do good work, and then people can choose. God either will bless it or he won’t, but what happens to my efforts is not my concern.” What the next generation believes about the gospel has been shaped in part by this avuncular philosopher; yet it was never his goal to have such power.

While Christians never have enough power, we do have plenty of power. There is enough power to do what God values the most—saving “everyone who believes.” We don’t have the power to change people and we cannot control people once they do become followers of Christ. But we do have the power to spread this message by life and words.

Winston Churchill was in many ways an egomaniac, consumed with power and sure that he was born to do great things. While he was not a Christian and was clearly advancing his career, he also used power on behalf of others. He was an imperfect man who took his own bathtub to war, but is considered by many to be the most courageous and determined leader of the twentieth century. He saved Western civilization by standing alone against Hitler in the early years of World War II.

Eugene Peterson pastored the same church for over thirty years, and it never exceeded five hundred attendees. You have to strain to hear his voice, and he barely moves his arms, modulates his voice, or moves his body in any noticeable way. He rarely tells a story or cracks a joke. The only reason we know anything about Peterson is the groundbreaking books he wrote, and his creation of the Bible paraphrase called *The Message*.

Sometimes Christian leaders fail and have bad motives, but if their work is for the kingdom of God, then it is all worth it. Whatever power God gives a leader with which to make an impact, it is a gift to be used. Use it with care.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Leader’s Worldview

Rehabilitate your interpretation of the world.

Jesus was effective in this world because he was guided by the reality of another world.

Nowadays, my favorite way to think of prayer is Jesus and me talking about what we are doing together. In this way I stay connected to the other world, the kingdom not of this world. This enables me to be a leader who is connected to my leader and to see the world the way he does.

Jesus’ behavior revealed his worldview. He valued the Father’s agenda more than a hassle-free life. He passed on to his disciples the worldview that connection with the Father is fundamental to accomplishing the mission. He taught them technique—to pray, heal, and preach—but the skills took a backseat to the relationship, which drove the agenda.

Jesus had taught his followers about the joy of relationship with his Father, so he was confident that they too had a worldview that valued the Father’s agenda more than personal comfort and safety. That’s why at the Last Supper he was able to tell his Father that his disciples were ready for the mission. As he prayed for them, he was saying, “They

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now know you. They believe. They are ready to go.” He said this *knowing that in a few hours Judas would betray him and the rest would flee in fear.*

In other words, according to Jesus, being ready to go out and accomplish the mission God has for you doesn’t mean passing every test. This is a significant point for the Christian leader. All of us live in a crucible of spiritual confusion and conflict. A good survival technique is to seek God’s kingdom and God’s ways with all our hearts, knowing that we will make mistakes. Our constant prayer must be, *God, this is what you called me to, this is what you want. I will faithfully stay in it when there is clarity, when there is fog, when there is discouragement, and when there is celebration and victory. Amen.*

A Christian leader’s worldview matters, as it determines what actions that leader will take. When we have a worldview that says the kingdom of God governs us, it revolutionizes what we do. I have not always had this worldview and consequently have at times failed to complete the mission God gave me.

Here’s a case in point. As pastor, in a church meeting from hell, I found out that the root of bitterness never tires. After years of conflict, I had thought we had worked it through and that people were tired of fighting. But when the candidates for church office came forward, it was clear a special-interest group had planned its counterattack and the new nominees had permission to create havoc. Two weeks later I resigned and walked away.

If my worldview had been like Jesus’ worldview, I would have given myself up as an offering to that congregation. Only God would have been able to release me from his call. Looking back, I believe I failed to complete the mission God had given me at the church. I could have stayed as a servant, but I wasn’t committed to them, to the church, and to the ways of Jesus. I will never know what God may have done. A leader’s worldview matters.

CHAPTER FIVE: The Humble Leader

Rehabilitate what you think of yourself.

Jesus was able to serve because he had a clear understanding of whom he was dependent on and gladly acknowledged it.

Years ago I was quite flummoxed by some of my congregation’s complaints that my books were on display in a showcase in the church lobby. People in the congregation were saying things like, “He is just promoting himself and it proves that he is arrogant.” The staff discussed whether we should take the display down. But I was angry. I didn’t want to take it down.

Humility does not come naturally to us. What’s natural is treating ourselves in the most generous way possible. And if we can surround ourselves with an entourage of lies about how great we are, so much the better. Even Jesus’ disciples argued among themselves as to which one of them was the greatest. The Christian’s struggle to be humble is amplified by the fact that we do not live in a humble culture. Despite our aversion to humility, there is no more important character trait for the Christian leader to develop. Jesus our model humbled himself, and we need to learn to do the same.

Quite often people mistake modesty for humility. Modesty involves not bragging or self-promoting. It can also refer to the way people dress, their walk and posture, and the way they talk. Evangelicals sometimes mistake passivity for humility. Humility is not the denial of your gifts and abilities—that is a lack of self-respect instead. After all, leadership requires ability. It also requires vision, conviction, and confidence.

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Humility is something you choose; it is not something you try. The decision to be humble is a lifelong one, much like deciding to follow Christ. But as in following Christ, every day is a series of choices. And those choices create something called character.

I have found it a near impossibility to identify my motivation as a leader. If I am excited about a big crowd, is it because I am rejoicing in people hearing the message or because I am thrilled they came to hear me? I think it is both, and both can be good. Because of my theological convictions that people need Christ, I am excited when many people will hear the message. I am also deeply satisfied that I get to be part of delivering the message, and the crowd makes me feel good. God made me to feel good when many others seem to be interested in what I have to say. God made me to experience pleasure, to be pleased when good things happen. Such is the joy of life. But if we don't keep the ego in check, we can take the credit rather than remember God's mission and our part in it.

I believe all serious Christian leaders live in the middle between pride and humility. I am dubious of the "all or nothing" advocates. We live life with a dash of pride here and a splash of humility there. So learn to live with some anxiety about your humility. God chose Peter, the least humble and most reckless of his disciples, to lead his church. Peter gave his life as a flawed man who lived in the knowledge that he was utterly dependent upon God. That, my friends, is the essence of humility.

CHAPTER SIX: Becoming Something Else

Rehabilitate how far you are willing to go.

Jesus withheld nothing; he taught us that we must lay aside privilege and that we have great capacity to change.

With leadership come pressure and challenges. There are forces at work that you cannot prepare for or anticipate, and they change you into something different than you would have been otherwise. New leaders in particular don't often think that leadership will change them in radical ways that could be painful. But we as leaders must be willing to change in order to learn how to live for others. As I tell my students, if you want to become something you have never been before, you will need to do things you have never done before. Jesus is our model in this. When God became a person, he took the definitive action of emptying himself of rights and privileges in order to serve and live for others.

You also may not know what you have in you until you step up, until you act in faith to obey God. I didn't know much about my leadership ability until after I became a follower of Christ. When I became a pastor, I needed to lead. Because I was required to lead, I discovered that I could lead. For me, and perhaps for you, Christian leadership is preternatural. It comes from outside my nature but has become part of my nature.

I became something else, something other than what I naturally would have become, by becoming an evangelical pastor. The office of pastor applied pressure that created in me a Christlike character. If I had not accepted the call, I would not have been changed. Do not underestimate the difficulty of the task. A pastor has to act like an adult, even though he is tempted to put his hand under his arm and make a rude noise.

Even though many of the changes in our lives are due to pressures that we don't choose or expect, we can practice some basic activities to prepare ourselves for change. If you want to nurture transformation, seek God in prayer and reading Scripture and other literature. Take time to pray and talk with others who are on the same journey of discipleship. Keep putting one foot in front of the other, walking in the right direction. Keep breathing spiritually, exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure. Then let life happen. With a seeking heart, you will start hearing from God.

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Selling leader transformation is like selling preventative health care. We know it is good to eat right, drink plenty of water, exercise, and get enough sleep. Everyone knows that healthful living can help delay or even prevent disease. But often we wait until illness strikes; then we become health conscious and join a health club. Life catches up with us. I call life “the big curriculum.” Most curricula are planned. You know what you are getting into and what the point is. The “big curriculum,” however, is unpredictable. It teaches us faster than any other kind. The important thing is to be ready to learn, and to have a prepared attitude that will turn all of life into a seminar on Christlikeness.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Leadership in Hard Times

Rehabilitate how much you can take.

Jesus taught us how to suffer under pressure, thrive in it, and teach others in the middle of it.

Some leaders are asked to die, others are required to live, but for most it is a little of both. All leaders are called to suffer. Jesus not only suffered, he also called his disciples to suffer. All of us who follow and lead for him will suffer in various ways. Yet after all his teaching on suffering, we find Jesus on his knees in the garden of Gethsemane, asking for a way out of the suffering. Doesn't this seem a bit conflicted, particularly since Jesus knew the reasons for and answers to suffering (unlike us)? His plea for a way out of the suffering seems to be an admission that suffering was not the preferred plan.

So what gives? There is room for anger here. The problem of illness and death troubles us. We never get used to it. When someone is lowered into the ground, something deep inside of us cries out, “This is wrong.” Christian leaders in particular must wrestle with the fact of suffering and the love of a God who lets bad things happen.

For me, the most challenging part of leading has been my inability to take away the trouble in people's lives. Somewhere Western Christians got the idea that God's favor means a life free of conflict and sorrow. Great Christian leaders must help people see the world the way God sees it: broken. The order of the world has been damaged, which includes everything in the physical realm.

Conversion is key to a person's ability to come to terms with the conflict and evil in the world. While the church may not have a fully satisfying intellectual answer to suffering, it does provide a loving community to help absorb the shock and trauma of such events. As we lead people through confusing and troubled times, they find comfort in conversion to Christ and in the “community of care” he has brought into existence.

A Bonhoeffer moment is a time when a leader must make a decision to do something different that will cause him or her to be transformed. A leader is faced with a Bonhoeffer moment when doing the right thing is a hard, disturbing, and threatening thing. Bonhoeffer saw from the beginning that Hitler and his philosophy could not be supported or tolerated by the Christian faith, and he made a decision to stand against them.

Contemporary Christian leaders face their own Bonhoeffer moments. It may be in regard to personal matters, such as telling the truth in conversations, or in regard to behind-the-scenes conduct—what we read, watch, and think. It is easy to compromise in small ways that don't seem to matter, but indeed they do, because small things are indicative of character. If a leader does not stand against the small evils, he or she is less likely to do so in the big moments. Of course, your Bonhoeffer moment may come on a more public scale.

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Of all the leaders in America, the most important are pastors. They are the last group of cultural teachers that remain a force for good. They are not strapped with limitations of government; they still have the freedom to teach and act without restraint. This is a Bonhoeffer moment. It is time to step up and speak out, to commit their lives and people to a life of discipleship. For as Bonhoeffer said himself, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” That is sacrificial leadership.

CHAPTER EIGHT: The Rewards of Leadership

Rehabilitate what you want out of it.

Jesus was satisfied with the knowledge that he had faithfully completed his Father’s work and that he had not squandered anything his Father entrusted to him.

Being a successful Christian leader comes with risks. Well-meaning people admire, recognize, reward, praise, and lavish material goods on you. You begin to feel invincible. If you are not careful, you can forget where you are—that you are standing on the pinnacle of the temple with a voice whispering in your ear, “Jump. Go ahead! You can fly.”

The risk of success not only includes the unholy trinity of money, sex, and power; it also includes the danger of living a religious life with no power. There is nothing quite so odious. Jesus taught that being open and honest were keys to knowing God. Religion, however, tends to make people closed and dishonest. And fame can ruin you, for it can cause you to be full of yourself.

Many Christian leaders have faced the risks that come with fame and have not succumbed. One thinks first of Billy Graham, who has lived humbly and has been admired for his compassion, conviction, and authenticity. Rick Warren is another who has done well with fame. When it became public he had paid back the salary he’d received from his church over the years and given away 90 percent of his book royalties, he silenced all sane critics. I think too of the great British pastor, John Stott. He lived a frugal and celibate life and wrote some of the best and most important books of our time.

The greatest reward a leader can experience in this life is the joy of seeing progress in others. Making a difference in their lives is what motivates me to keep writing, sitting down daily and putting my feet under the desk and typing words up on the screen. The goal of my instruction has been to convince leaders to invest their lives in teaching others to obey everything that Christ commanded. I have always believed that there is nothing wrong with the church that discipleship cannot cure. Discipleship is the hope of the world because it produces a quality of life that preserves the moral character of a society and illuminates the darkest corners of the human personality.

My greatest satisfaction has always been that others have caught this same vision for life as I have. It is quite satisfying to receive a thank-you for my ministry to the pastors I have helped or when one of my books is quoted. Sometimes it is frightening to know how much influence I have had on thousands of pastors and parishioners around the globe. When my plane lifts off the ground from yet another city where I have ministered, I often get a rush of thanksgiving. I have done well; I have helped someone, and I have left behind ideas and books. There are great rewards in being noticed, wanted, and respected. They are much better than trophies.

On this side of the heavenly divide we often receive our recognition with pride. In heaven it will be with humility. We will be inclined to share the crown, to think of ourselves as undeserving. The rewards God gives will survive the fire of

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his judgment and discerning eye. When our letters, trophies, and mementos are lost or destroyed, what God has called great and good will remain with us forever.

CHAPTER NINE: Leaders Are A Work in Progress

Rehabilitate your heart to stay in the struggle.

Jesus modeled for us that leadership is as much following, listening, and submitting as it is leading others. It will involve pain and pleasure, and it will continue until we are finished with God's work.

Leaders are a work in progress. Isn't this obvious? It takes a lifetime to learn just a little about pleasing God. That is why we don't retire from the school of discipleship. That is why we don't ever arrive or learn enough. We can't kick back and coast once we acquire a certain level of knowledge and maturity. People of a certain age often find it easy to coast, to live on yesterday's manna and drop out from the struggle of inner change. But when we do, our heart for God withers away.

There is a better way. Learning as a disciple, an apprentice of Jesus is a supernatural process. It touches the deepest part of our souls for all our lives.

Christian leadership calls for authentic living. It requires humility, service, vulnerability, sacrificial living, and the willingness to put up with a constant stream of abuse. Sometimes that abuse and criticism can be mere street noise, but other times it is a jackhammer in your head. The Christian leader is called to receive criticism in humility, to learn from it, to admit one's faults, and to not seek revenge. An argument can be made that any sensible person would not choose to be a Christian leader.

I have often reflected on the fact that nowhere in the New Testament did God call anyone to leadership as a paid religious professional. I can't say God's call to me was to be a pastor or to work for a mission enterprise. It was a call to organize my life around his purpose for my life. I have intentionally never tried to figure out the calling. The conceit of the mind can destroy life's sweetest truth that God knows me and has told me what to do.

Last Sunday right before our pastor was to preach, I leaned over and said to Jane, "I want to race the pastor to the pulpit and preach the sermon." The call to preach is permanent. It is wonderful how the work that pleases God also pleases the person called to do the work. When I pass a large church building, my pulse quickens. I may even salivate. The urge to preach, to lead, and to make it happen just won't go away. When God gives you a desire to do something, it doesn't diminish. The body and mind may weaken, but you can't help fulfilling his call on your life until you can't do it anymore.

God is pleased when we accept what he has made us to be. I spent much of my life trying to be someone else: the successful pastor, teacher, speaker, or leader. In recent days my relationship to God has been especially joyous. Conditions are good and that helps. But I relish my days. They are full of—shall I say it?—fun. I don't feel the weight of the world on my shoulders; I have given back the responsibility to change the world to God. He has relieved me of my self-importance. I can't stop leading, however; God has given me the desire to invest in people's lives and the power to govern my ego. These things please him and they please me.

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The Communicator's Corner

I recently heard someone say, "In many places in the world the church is persecuted and fears the raised fist. In America the church is not persecuted and fears the raised eyebrow." (pp. 30-31)

My wife has said to me, "Bill, when we were first married, you were very selfish. Now you are just selfish. (p. 108)

I am like an elderly woman dressed in an evening gown waiting to be discovered by her Prince Charming. (p.128)

A. W. Tozer famously said in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." I understand Tozer's meaning and would not dispute its importance. But I would challenge the idea that what I think about God is the single most important thing about me. I must cast my lot with C. S. Lewis who said in his famous sermon *The Weight of Glory*, "I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think about God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important." (p. 173)

When I first arrived at the church, there was a backlog of young couples that wanted to get married—about ten as I remember it. I began a busy season of premarital counseling. As I interviewed the couples, I learned that several of them were in a hurry to marry because of pregnancy. According to the church wedding policy, pregnant couples had to be married in the chapel. They were not allowed to be married in the sanctuary, and only immediate family members were allowed to attend the ceremony as guests. The bride was not supposed to wear a white dress. This was the penalty the couple had to pay for the pregnancy. I didn't agree with the policy because it didn't deal with the real issues—premarital sex on the part of the couple and a judgmental spirit on the part of the church. As I quizzed the couples, I found that most of them were engaging in premarital sex. According to church policy, however, the brides-to-be who were not pregnant could have the full wedding with white dress and all. I went to the church board and explained that the sin was premarital sex—not getting pregnant—and that most of the engaged couples were having sex. I felt that to be consistent, they should have to pay the same penalty as the couples who were expecting babies. Some of the offenders were their sons and daughters. When I finished, the room was silent. (pp. 128-129)