

Reading Reflection of

Dave Earley, “Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders”

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Successful high impact spiritual leaders have something in common. According to the research done by Dr. Dave Earley; prayer is an essential element of biblical leadership and while it is not the only act of leadership it should be the common denominator.¹ Earley is the founding and senior pastor of New Life Church in Columbus, Ohio, as well as the creator of the New Life Center for Church Growth, Health, and Multiplication. Earley speaks around the country on the subjects of prayer, spiritual formation, leadership, small groups, and church planting. He has written several books and in his book “Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders” he defines leadership as influencing others and the best way to influence others is through prayer, as prayer influences God to influence others.² Earley has identified nine prayer disciplines seen in the lives of leaders who have successfully led others for God. Successful leaders; value prayer, make time to pray, pray for those they serve, train others to prayer, turn problems into pray, fast, possess a bold faith, build on the basics, and adopt best practices.

Leaders must value prayer; it must be the most important task at hand. Spiritual leadership has eternal ramifications and souls hang in the balance, our attitude needs to reflect this importance. It is not an easy task as Dick Eastman stated, “An intercessor must bid farewell to self and welcome the burdens of humanity”.³ Paul understood the burdens we would encounter as believers, when he wrote to the Corinthians, “Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift

¹ Earley, Dave. Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders. Chattanooga: Living Ink Books, 2008.

² Ibid., 3

³ Ibid., 37

at sea.” In his letter to the Ephesians he explains why he experienced so much difficulty and where the battle is. As he details in Ephesian 6, we are soldiers in a spiritual warfare, we must put on the armor of God, stand firm, and pray for each other. After researching the essentials of prayer in the bible David Jeremiah wrote, “Everything God does in the work of ministry, He does through prayer.”⁴ Many do not understand the power of prayer. In regards to this Billy Graham wrote, “We have even discovered the secret of releasing energy in the atom, which is capable of destroying entire cities and civilizations. But very few of us have learned how to fully develop the power of prayer”.⁵

Making time to pray is essential for successful leadership. Jesus made time to pray and He is the very person we as believers should be looking to as an example. During the Last Supper Jesus knew His hour had come so he wanted to speak a few things to His disciples and as He washed their feet He stated, “I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” (John 13:15). “Jesus knew and lived the life of human leadership. We need to adopt Jesus Christ as the foundation on which everything we learn about leadership is built and the template on which everything we learn about leadership is hung”.⁶ Jesus was 100% God and He was 100% human. He suffered through being human and understands our afflictions. His whole life was a model and example for us to follow. From His example we learn that He made time to pray; he prayed early in the morning (Mark 1:35) and late at night (Mark 6:46). He also selected secluded and silent places to pray. “There can be no communion with a holy God, no fellowship

⁴ Ibid., 10

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 17

between heaven and earth, no power for the salvation of souls, unless much time is set apart for it.” Andrew Murray.⁷

Effective spiritual leaders pray for those they serve. One of the most powerful ways for leaders to exercise love for those they serve is to intercede for them in prayer. E.M. Bounds said, “Talking to men for God is a great thing. But talking to God for men is greater still”.⁸ Jesus is the great intercessor as he sits at the right hand of God interceding for us. John 17 is a great example of praying; Jesus uses adoration, supplication, and intercession. There is also a great promise that others will believe in Him when believers are as one. True intercession makes a big difference as it elevates others and stands in the gap or breach between them and God.

“Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.” (Psalm 106:23). True intercession can heal the sick and bring salvation (James 5:15). Intercession is costly and we must be willing to accept the costs of self-denial, tears, and time. Our attitude should be as John Hyde’s when he said, “O God give me souls or I die”⁹ and like Moses when he interceded for Israel saying to God “Forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out” (Exodus 32:32).

Great spiritual leaders understand the importance of prayer and intercession, so they train others to pray for them. Paul was a great spiritual leader and his leadership influenced like few others. He also experienced the hardships of spiritual leadership like few others. Earley states that Paul was able to endure such hardships because he recognized the need and power of prayer. While Paul never solicited money he did solicit prayers often in his letters (Rom. 15:30-33; Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:2-4; 1 Thess. 3:2). Successful leaders recognize their need for prayer and the

⁷ Ibid., 31

⁸ Ibid., 34

⁹ Ibid., 41

power of having prayer partners. Charles Spurgeon when often asked of his success would simply reply, “My people pray for me”.¹⁰ Charles Finney said he found the secret of spiritual effectiveness by observing another pastor during a prayer meeting; a member got up and confessed of his neglect to stay up till midnight praying on Saturday nights. To Finney, the secret was out the pastor had a praying church.¹¹

Spiritual stewardship is casting all our cares on Him; spreading it out before God, turning our pressures and problems into prayer. Jesus took on the sin of all and no human has ever felt the pressure like Him. “He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). David was another leader who dealt with intense pressure. When one studies David’s prayers, his most used prayer can be summed up very well in one word, ‘Help!’ “‘Call to God, Cry Out, Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you’ that was David’s plan.”¹² Earley writes; turn your prayers into provisions, problems into rescue, and indecision into breakthrough. “We let God work for us, when the hour of trial of our faith comes, and do not work a deliverance of our own.” -- George Muller.¹³

Moses had fasted for forty days when he came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments. Earley writes, “That fasting has long played a significant role in the prayer ministry of the effective spiritual leader.” Samuel, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Ezra, Esther, Paul, and Jesus are among those who fasted in the bible. Fasting helps in denying yourself, breaking down

¹⁰ Ibid., 63

¹¹ Earley, Dave. Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders. Chattanooga: Living Ink Books, 2008.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 85

the barrier between you and God. “When you long to strengthen and discipline your prayer habits and to add a new dimension to your prevailing in prayer, add fasting.”—Wesley Duewel. According to Earley we should fast for; revival, monetary miracles, healing, messages to preach, and for huge evangelistic results.

High-impact spiritual leaders pray boldly. Earley writes we are to boldly claim God’s promises and to be specific in prayer. Hudson Taylor said he believed, “the promises of the Bible to be very real, and that prayer is in sober fact transacting business with God, whether on one’s own behalf or on behalf of those for whom one seeks his blessing.”¹⁴ Earley makes a bold statement saying, “If we don’t use His promises to the fullest, then Christ will have died in vain.”¹⁵ The promises of God can help us boldly go before God. “The bible contains 7,487 promises, many of these contain God’s willingness to answer prayer.”¹⁶ Earley goes on to give suggestions for being more specific, bold, and effective in prayer; pray about what to pray for, pray for what you desire for, have pure motives, and go on record by telling someone.

Great spiritual leaders build on the basics. They take the model Jesus gave us, in Mathew 6:9-13 which is a prayer of balance and variety, and build on this model. Earley mentions this model for prayer using the acrostic ACTS; Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Earley has a modified acrostic TACS, it models the Lord’s Prayer and in addition Psalm 100 verse 4, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.” A recurring prayer of thanksgiving in the bible is “Give thanks to the lord, for he is good; his love endures forever”, Psalm 106:1. Thanksgiving is a grateful

¹⁴ Ibid., 91-92

¹⁵ Ibid., 114

¹⁶ Ibid., 116

attitude verbalized. “It is an indication of humility and the cure from complaining.”¹⁷ Adoration is praising God for who he is, “the great and awesome God” (Nehemiah 1:5). David wrote many prayers that were praises, the Hebrew word Psalms means praises, and he understood the power of singing prayers of praise. Augustine knew this secret as he stated, “To sing once is to pray twice.”¹⁸ Earley finishes his writings on building on the basics by adding that we must also; confess our sin, an act of agreeing with God about the existence and seriousness of our sin and do supplication which is asking God to supply ours and other’s needs.

Finally as Earley studied the lives of high-impact spiritual leaders, he learned some practices that were not used by all of them. He called these best practices and mentions them in his book. The best practices are; Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), persisting until an answer comes (parable of persistent widow, Luke 18), prayer retreats, instant messages sent to God (during the busyness send short brief messages to God), praying the scriptures (claiming the word of God), a frank familiarity (talking as you would to a friend), group prayer meetings, listen and smuggling prayer (blind their eyes and deaf their ears), and prayer walking (praying as you walk with your eyes open).

¹⁷ Ibid., 133

¹⁸ Ibid., 139

When I started reading the book I don't believe I highlighted much in the book until I got to chapter 3. I thought Earley was putting lots of information out without getting to the details. He mentioned the importance of prayer in spiritual leadership and quoted many successful leaders. However in my mind I was still doubtful, I wondered if I could put together a list of those in the bible who God used that did not pray so much. I wondered does persistence apply to prayers and is it a lack of faith. My first highlight in the book was the part where he mentions effective spiritual leaders elevate their followers over themselves. He talks of Moses when God wanted to destroy Israel and how Moses stood in the breach saying to God "Forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out".

Earley did a very good job of convincing that effective spiritual leaders pray for their people. My mind was renewed and transformed as I read of Paul's intercessory prayers for others. I started to agree with Earley that true intercession makes a huge difference and as it did with Earley, Psalm 106:23 spoke to my soul. "Had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying them." The powerful stories from the bible and great leaders began to sink in. One such story was about George Mueller, when God placed it on his heart to pray for five people. He did every day his whole life, and the last one came to Christ right after his funeral.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid., 139

I like the discipline of training others to pray for you. I had never heard of this before but I have suspected that God wanted such. I would have people call me and intercede in my life, and I often wondered about this. I now know God has called people to pray for me. The statistics that Earley mentions should open any leader's eyes to the opposition that will be faced.²⁰ He does a good job of showing how others believe in intercessory prayer. One such was from Spurgeon when asked of his success he would often state, "My people pray for me". Moody's story of the bedridden girl praying for revival at her church is also good, it is very moving and shows the importance of intercession prayer.

The chapters Building on the basics and Turning your problems into prayer went hand in hand to me. Practicing spiritual stewardship; dealing with pressure, crying for help, spreading it out before the Lord were helpful topics and I could apply these in building on the model of the Lord's Prayer. To me the Turning your problems into prayer was a chapter about supplication, however I did get valuable information from the chapter. Possessing a Bold Faith was a chapter of good insight. While I have applied promises of God before, I never have on this level. I am challenged to search the scriptures for promises I can apply. ACTS is a good acrostic to use and Earley gave very insightful information on David and how he took prayers and made them unto song and praise. I love the quote of Augustine that Earley mentions, "To sing once is to pray twice."²¹ I have experienced the power of praise, and how my praise and worship has turned into prayer and vice versa.

Finally the chapter of Fasting I will need to revisit, Earley mentions Isaiah 58 but I see the interpretations differently. As verses 5-7 say, "Is this what you call fasting? Do you really

²⁰ Ibid., 57

²¹ Ibid., 48

think this will please the LORD? “No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless...” I understand Jesus fasted right after John baptized Him and the Spirit came upon Him. He went into the wilderness to fast and to crucify the flesh. I am open to the idea of fasting, as God looks at the heart and anything that helps us deny ourselves is good and am willing to give this a try.

Reading and applying this book to my prayer life has been greatly beneficial. Knowledge is powerful, as Walter Elwell wrote, "Truth is not identical to knowledge. Knowledge is some person's warranted grasp or awareness of truth".²² In Elwell's Dictionary of Theology he writes that Theology “will always be nurtured by prayer. Moreover it will give special attention to the life of prayer, since theology is inseparable from spirituality.”²³

I have to admit my knowledge about prayer was lacking, almost to a point of ignorance. The readings, principles, suggestions, and guides in this book really started to be an eye opener and as I started making applications I started seeing instant results. If I feel this way how many others feel this way? I think one of the most beneficial applications of this book is that I have new knowledge of prayer that I want to share with others.

Successfully I have been able to establish a regular prayer time in the morning. I have also established other times during the day to pray. I have a secret place that I go to outdoors that enhances my walk with God. I find myself wanting to pray more and more. I understand the power of prayer partners and have recruited people to pray for me. I intercede for people on a regular basis and I listen for what God wants me to pray for. I like this humility and the boldness

²² Elwell, Walter A. Baker's evangelical dictionary of biblical theology. Grand Rapids: Baker books, 1996.

²³ Ibid., 946

of Hebrews 4:16, “So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.” I seek other promises in the bible to take to God in prayer with boldness. The application of thanksgiving has been a really exciting area in my life. It has changed my attitude in many areas. It has been nice to know and believe that God will take on all my problems.

The power of prayer has new meaning to me. As John Calvin wrote prayer is “the soul of faith”.²⁴ When I read James it has a whole new light. “Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.” (James 5:13-15).

²⁴ Ibid., 946

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