

THE FOUR TRAITS OF  
THOSE WHO WIELD LASTING INFLUENCE



LEADERSHIP

AS AN

IDENTITY

*"This book will inspire you and equip you to become a leader God uses for His glory."*

—TONY DUNGY

CRAWFORD W. LORITTS, JR.



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“For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

\*PSALM 51:16–17

“Your heart for God may be . . . destroyed by allowing the fires of jealousy, anger, self-pity, worry, or gluttony to go unchecked in your life.”

\*NANCY LEIGH DEMOSS

## FALLING INTO SIN

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One of the godliest men I've ever known was Bill Bright. Bill was in many ways an unassuming man, but God gave him the incredible assignment of building a movement that would proclaim the gospel around the world. Under his leadership Campus Crusade for Christ grew to be the largest parachurch organization of its kind, as well as one of the most effective evangelistic movements in the history of the church. My wife and I had the privilege of serving with Campus Crusade for twenty-seven years, and today I serve as a member of the board of directors.

Bill was a man who seemed to walk and work in a state of continual worship. And yet he never lost his sense of how weak and fragile he was; he never forgot that he was a sinner. I recall hearing him say many

times, “Please pray for me. I don’t want to lose my first love. I don’t want to do anything that would bring shame to my Savior.”

He understood that God’s blessing and favor on Campus Crusade for Christ did not mean that he was somehow less capable of falling into sin. If anything, he clearly understood that the awesome, holy God of the universe had entrusted a vision and an assignment to a mere man who had weaknesses and temptations like everyone else. And he wasn’t afraid to let others know that he needed the prayers of God’s people to help him to overcome and to finish well. His humility and sincerity drew your heart to him. You wanted to follow his leadership because he was aware of how much he needed God and His strength to resist the pull toward sinful disobedience.

In this regard Bill Bright was just like the rest of us. When a leader operates from a position of brokenness, he realizes that he is capable of sinful failure.

#### ONE DECISION AWAY

It’s important to understand that as long as we are standing on this side of heaven we are very capable of hurting the heart of God, betraying His trust, and damaging the cause of Christ. As Jim Reese, a businessman and the chairman of the elders at our church, says, “A challenge not only for young leaders but for all leaders is that you are one decision away from losing the ability to lead.”

Seeking God and surrendering to Him has to be a disciplined process because the struggle and battle with the flesh is never over. Tim Kimmel points out that “Brokenness empowers a leader because it forces him or her to do more than lip service to the grace of God. When we realize how utterly helpless we are and how utterly self-destructive we are capable of being when left to our own

devices, we gain a better understanding of just how amazing God's grace really is."

The apostle Paul touched on this theme several times in his epistles. In 1 Timothy 3:6–7, for example, he writes that a leader "must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, *so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*"

Also, take a look at Paul's direct, sobering words to the young leader Timothy:

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

\* 2 TIMOTHY 2:20–22

Finally, notice how intentional and passionate Paul is about his life and ministry as he shares his heart motivation in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, *lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

## NOBLE ASSIGNMENTS

There are three big lessons in these passages.

First, *the lives we lead as leaders should be well-thought-of by a watching world*. People may not agree with us and they may even despise what we stand for, but we should never give them an objective reason to reject us and what we believe due to the sinful inconsistency of our lives. How many times have we seen Christianity ridiculed in the press over the past two decades because an outspoken leader fell into the very type of sin he publicly condemned?

Second, *our lives should match the message and the noble assignments that God entrusts to us*. This is what Paul means by being a vessel of honor. God wants to serve His meals on clean plates. Our job is to make sure that our lives are clean. Again, God is not so much concerned about our abilities and gifts as He is about our personal holiness. We have to keep the plate clean.

Third, *leaders have been and will be disqualified by God if we do not run His race according to His rules*. God does not put up with sin. And if we continue to sin, He will take His assignments away from us and declare us unusable and replace us with someone else who will live for Him (1 Samuel 15). And in some cases the failure to clean up our lives will be the cause of physical death (1 John 5:16–17).

I am not saying that godly leaders never sin. But what I am saying is that patterns of sin should not dominate our lives and our call to lead must be viewed as a call to Christlikeness in every area of our lives. Overcoming sin and keeping our hearts and lives pure is our passion. We want people to follow us because we are following Christ. We're not just telling people what Jesus said; we are by His grace and strength living what He said.

## A PULL TOWARD SIN

It is true that God will use our past failures, as in the case of King David's adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11) and Peter's denial of Jesus (Matthew 26:69–75). These failures break God's heart and, if followed by repentance, keep our hearts tender, producing a sweet God-dependent life. But failure should not be the primary source of our brokenness. It is the ever-present realization that we *could* hurt His heart—that we carry within us a pull toward sin—that ought to keep us pushing toward God. We should be most afraid when we forget that we need His help to stand, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

In an essay entitled "Becoming a Leader of No Reputation," Scott Rodin wrote of his convictions about leadership after serving for several years as a seminary president:

*If I could put one Bible verse on the desk of every pastor and every Christian leader in the world, it would be this, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). As Christian leaders we must be engaged in a constant process of self-evaluation and repentance. It is so easy for us to be tempted in a variety of directions, and when we stray, we impact our entire ministry. Good leaders undertake their work with a deep humility and a keen awareness of their own weaknesses and shortcomings.<sup>2</sup>*

Again, this humility is what I observed and learned as I watched Bill Bright and so many other leaders who have and are influencing my life. Their conscious awareness that they are capable of being overcome by sin produces a humility and authenticity that draws people to them but, more important, draws the

attention and favor of God to them (1 Peter 5:5–6). As leaders we should plead with God to help us to never forget this.

#### LIVING HIS LIFE THROUGH US

Leaders need to be particularly aware of whose life is on display. Our brokenness reminds us that *Christ must live His life through us*. Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Those who follow you as leaders should see Christ both in terms of who you are and in how you go about fulfilling the assignments God has given to you. Your human tendency for sin should drive you to the cross, shouting all the way that you need Jesus. When you place your brokenness at the foot of the cross, you declare that you have nothing to prove and that Jesus Christ Himself makes Himself known through mortal, fragile human beings.

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