

# Building Below the Waterline

**Title:** *Building Below the Waterline: Strengthening the Life of a Leader*

**Author:** Gordon MacDonald

**Copyright Date:** 2011

## Book Summary:

Christian professionals and church leaders alike will benefit from Gordon MacDonald's work. In this collection of writings from the pages of Leadership Journal, he imparts wisdom to Christian leaders in all areas of ministry and encourages them to grow—from the ground up—a strong, spiritual foundation, especially in the unseen areas of life.

## Book Notes:

It is one more illustration of an ageless principle in leadership: the work done below the waterline (in a leader's soul) that determines whether he or she will stand the test of time and challenge. This work is called worship, devotion, spiritual discipline. It's done in quiet, where no one but God sees. (1)

Leaders blessed with great natural skills and charisma may be vulnerable to collapse in their character, their key relationships, and their center of belief because they never learned that one cannot (or should not) build above the waterline until there is a substantial foundation below it. (2)

## Leadership Traits

- The first trait of a leader is the ability to communicate vision.
- The second trait of a Christian leader is sensitivity to people.
- The third trait a leader must possess is the ability to assess situations.
- The fourth trait is keen self-knowledge. (6-7)

A second impression: the dreadful casualty list of men and women who do not make it to a tenth anniversary in Christian ministry. Burnout, failure, and disillusionment are exacting a terrible toll. I'm amazed how many leaders just disappear, just drop off the edge. (16-17)

The forming of the soul that it might be a dwelling place for God is the primary work of the Christian leader. This is not an add-on, an option, or a third-level priority. Without this core activity, one almost guarantees that he or she will not last in leadership for a lifetime, or that what work is accomplished will become less and less reflective of God's honor and God's purposes. (17)

If even a sliver of the virtue of humility grows out of the ground of my soul today, it is only because I am old

enough to be well acquainted with the overpowering effects of sin, the realities of personal limits and liabilities, and the corrosive effects of perpetual accomplishment. (19)

Faith: and ability to trust in and draw upon the power of God beyond my rationality, my instinctive pessimism, my willingness to settle for less than best. (21)

Be content to be a pleasure to Christ, a lover to your wife, a grandfather to your children's children, a friend to those who want to share life with you, and a servant to your generation. (28)

Without a mission, people live by reaction rather than initiation. (29)

I learned quickly in my younger pastoral years that people would follow only so far if I traded exclusively on my natural gifts: words that came easily, personal charm, new ideas, and dreams. I was tempted to think that just because I had a seminary degree, because I was ordained, and because I was more knowledgeable about biblical ideas, people should have unlimited faith in me. (68)

How is trust generated? Here are seven sources I have observed over the years.

1. Trust builds with consistency.
2. Trust builds with dependability.
3. Trust builds with openness.
4. Trust builds with a reputation for hard work.
5. Trust builds with a belief that the pastor has an impartial pastoral eye for everyone.
6. Trust builds with longevity.
7. Trust builds with an ever-deepening spirit. (71-72)

Somewhere along the line, I learned to "fly in formation" with a select collection of authors. Paul Tournier taught me about people. Elton Trueblood gave me a love for ideas and the life of the mind. A.W. Tozer elevated my concept of God and worship. E. Stanley Jones became my inspiration for evangelism and the kingdom. John Stott taught me the power and dignity of preaching and gave me a hunger for biblical scholarship that had the "streets" of the real world in mind. And dear Henri Nouwen revealed to me the disciplines of the interior life. (99)

My point is this: What money is to the financial folks, and power is to political people, and knowledge is to intellectuals, intimacy—deep connections with people—is to those of us who are in the people business (pastors, spiritual directors, therapists, psychologists, counselors). (155)

In the book (*How The Mighty Fall*), (James) Collins identifies five stages in the process of organizational slippage.

- Hubris Born of Success

I'm tempted to say that there may be more failure stories arising from hubris than success stories rising from humility.

- **Undisciplined Pursuit of More**

Overreaching is the undisciplined pursuit of growth accompanied by the neglect of those core principles upon which an organization was originally built.

- **Denial of Risk and Peril**

Collins' third stage of decline emerges when leaders and organizations ignore or minimize critical information, or refuse to listen to things they do not want to hear.

Ahab's answer is remarkable: "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah...." (1Kgs. 22:8)

- **Grasping for Salvation**

- **Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death (176-182)**