Practicing Greatness

Title: ***Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders***

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Copyright Date: 2006

Book Summary:

Often spiritual leaders do not aspire to greatness for fear of seeming to lack humility. Yet greatness in spiritual leadership is just what we need—in our churches, our businesses, in education, in the social sector, in every sector of society. The question is how do good spiritual leaders become great leaders?

Based on his extensive experience as coach and mentor to many thousands of Christian leaders across a broad spectrum of ministry settings, Reggie McNeal helps spiritual leaders understand that they will self—select into or out of greatness. In this important book, McNeal shows how great spiritual leaders are committed consciously and intentionally to seven spiritual disciplines, habits of heart and mind that shape both their character and competence:

Book Notes:

Great leaders bless people. They inspire and encourage. (4)

Leaders who have an appropriate view of self (humility), combined with the capacity to help others (service), don't just show up in the nick of time. They are crafted over time. They practice being great.

Extraordinary character and exceptional competence develop over time. Leaders must make countless good choices and right calls to fashion greatness. (6)

Practicing greatness requires that the spiritual leader develop some key "disciplines." These are self—awareness, self—management, self—development, mission, decision making, belonging, and aloneness. (6)

- The discipline of self—awareness is most important because it protects leaders from being self—absorbed or merely role—driven.
- The discipline of self—management acknowledges that great leaders are great managers, not just of others but, primarily and foremost, of themselves.
- The discipline of self—development characterizes all great leaders. They never stop growing.
- The discipline of mission honors the propensity of great leaders to give themselves to great causes.
- The discipline of decision making sets great leaders apart from good run–of–the–mill leaders.
- The discipline of belonging characterizes great leaders' ability to enjoy significant relationships that nurture their lives.

- The discipline of aloneness celebrates great leaders' capacity not only to endure the loneliness of leadership but to actually build solitude into their lives.

Genuinely great spiritual leaders do not do what they do for themselves or even as a way to become recognized as great leaders. The end game for spiritual leaders is about expanding the kingdom of God. (8)

HENRY Cloud and Steve Townsend have identified four problematic boundary types: complaints, avoidants, controllers, and nonresponsives. (21)

- **Complaints.** Complaints are people who allow others to violate their personal boundaries, mainly because they don't want to "hurt others' feelings"—a telltale phrase indicating how complaints inappropriately take on the responsibility of managing other people's emotions.
- **Avoidants.** Avoidants evidence another set of boundary problems. In effect, they shut the gates when they should let others in; these leaders withdraw under pressure.
- **Controllers.** Controllers are people who don't respect others' boundaries and, in some cases, don't even realize that boundaries exist.
- **Nonresponsives.** Nonresponsives are leaders who have learned to deal with boundary issues by not responding to others' needs or problems. (21—24)

Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima identify five types of dark—side leaders: compulsive, narcissistic, paranoid, codependent, and passive—aggressive. (30)

- **Compulsive Leaders.** Compulsive leaders need to maintain absolute order.
- **Narcissistic Leaders.** Narcissistic leaders combine intense ambitiousness, overwhelming feelingsof inferiority, and excessive needs for affirmation.
- **Paranoid Leaders.** Paranoid leaders are suspicious of others and therefore extremely guarded in their relationships.
- **Codependent Leaders.** Codependent people are often drawn to the ministry and to other helping professions out of a seemingly hard—wired tendency to be focused on others' actions and emotions at the expense of their own boundaries and emotional states.
- **Passive—Aggressive Leaders.** Passive—aggressive leaders resist others' demands by procrastinating and by being stubborn and forgetful. (30—31)

Great leaders are great managers—not just managers of projects or other people but mostly of themselves. (35)

In addition to cultivating the positive habits that promote excellent brain functioning, effective leaders know they have to avoid those people and situations that sap their mental health. Three "brain killers" deserve special attention: (1) negative people, (2) disorganization, and 3) second—guessing decisions. (50)

Yet temptations come in other categories than just moral choices or character challenges. Many leaders, for instance, may not consider discouragement a temptation. But it is. Many leaders welcome discouragement too

readily and play with it too long, feeling that they can afford it. Every leader faces discouragement: even great leaders do. But great leaders move past it, while other, lesser leaders discouragement into a pet or lifelong companion. (52)

Behavioral scientist and journalist Daniel Goleman contends that only one—third of a leader's effectiveness lies in the areas of raw intelligence and technical expertise. The other two—thirds comprise the dimensions of what Goleman calls emotional intelligence, which include qualities such as self—awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal, self—motivation, and empathy. (56)

The reason for this is simple: every leader experiences failure at some level. Great leaders, however, refuse to accept failure as a destination. They recast failure into an opportunity for self—development. (62)

Great leaders, on the other hand, tell you what they are intending to accomplish, the mission they are on. "I am working to change _____" or "I am investing my life in _____ in order to _____." These leaders speak in terms of contribution, of significance, of changing the world. They don't work for an organization; the organization works for them. Their job, their role, their current assignment is the venue or platform from which they pursue their life mission. No matter what job they take or role they fill, they redefine the position to fit their mission, not the other way around. They do not hammer their mission into fitting their work assignment. Just the opposite is true. The life mission of great leaders determines the content of their days, of their work, of their energies and talents. In short, great leaders practice the discipline of mission. (82)

Great leaders pick the causes, seize the opportunities, and address the needs that are in line with their mission. (84)

Great spiritual leaders understand that their mission is not something they invent. Rather, they realize that their life mission is something they discover. They believe God is the One who has determined their life assignment. He has gone to great efforts at sowing clues in the leader's life to help foster this discovery process. Talent, passion, experiences, successes, personality traits, opportunities—all provide helpful hints in this discovery process. Great leaders discern a divine pattern for an intentional path to significance and fulfillment. These gifts and clues are interrelated. Together they form a picture of the leader's mission—the one that guides his life's efforts, much the way an image on the box lid of a jigsaw puzzle helps the puzzle worker know what to look for and see how the pieces of the puzzle fit together. (84)

The point to all of this is that I coach spiritual leaders to treat their call more fluently than most of them are inclined to do. They confuse the content of the call with the context of the call and how God might choose for them to live out the call in their lives. The need to be more flexible in this regard will be increasingly important for leaders as the expression of spirituality in North America moves beyond institutional settings into the street and marketplace. The desire to serve people in spiritual leadership will make the same transition. It already is. Each week I run into people who once pursued their call in the church but now are working on some aspect of community or business leadership as the way to express their call to ministry. (86)

Spiritual leaders need to distill out the core, the essence, of their call from God. Some key questions might help provide some clues:

- What people or cause do you feel drawn to?
- What do you want to help people do or achieve or experience?
- How do you want to help people?
- What message do you want to deliver?

- How do you intend to serve or have an impact on the world?
- Why did you say yes to God to begin with? (86)

The truth is, God has not called you to your life mission in spite of who you are, he has called you precisely because of who you are. (89)

Your best shot at making your greatest contribution in the world is for you to get better at what you are already good at. (89)

The greatest leaders are those liberated by purpose. They know why they are on the planet, and they are pursuing their life mission with determined enthusiasm. They have gained permission not just to lead; they also possess the freedom to live, really live. Knowing their mission and ordering their life and ministry around it grants these leaders certain key permissions. (93)

Great leaders consider six elements when making decisions.

1. Ask the Right Questions
2. Get Enough of the Right Kind of Information
3. Consider Timing
4. Involve the Right People
    - Key Leaders
    - Legitimizers
    - Veto Holders
    - Implementers
    - Those Affected by the Decision
5. Operate with the Right Motives
6. Understand Intended Outcomes (103—114)

Spiritual leaders who want to practice greatness today operate within the quantum universe, emphasizing connectivity, belonging, and community. (124)

The chance to journey through live with a soul mate is worth whatever effort is required. (127)

Humility can give another soul attention without demanding reciprocity. (131)

We've already acknowledged that leadership is lonely, even if leaders cultivate the kind of belonging we talked about in the last chapter. The truth remains that the experience of leadership is far deeper than loneliness. It involves aloneness. (143)

Leaders who achieve greatness in the spiritual world not only endure aloneness, they build in into their lives. They appreciate the depth of soul making that is possible only solitude. They even come to the place of

craving solitude, not just because of a person of their personality type might prefer it but because they find that solitude restores to them the emotional and spiritual center they need for their leadership challenges. (143)

No leader goes through wilderness unchanged. The transformation may be in the leader's mission or person, or both. Usually both life and ministry are altered. No leader wants to repeat wilderness. Great leaders, on the other hand, would not exchange the experience for anything. It is often in the wilderness they come to their truest understanding of who they are and what they want to accomplish. In the end they find themselves grateful that God would grace them so profoundly. (148—149)

God instituted Sabbath to give people rest, which involves more dimensions that just physical relief. In biblical terms the day is designed to disrupt life's usual routines to allow people the opportunity to remember and to reflect. (149)

In this practice of Sabbath we debrief our decisions, our attitudes, our relationships, our leadership, our goals, our achievements, and our challenges. (150)

Practicing aloneness in today's North American culture requires considered intentionality. Three enemies of this discipline conspire against leaders' need and determination to build solitude into their lives: (1) mismanagement of time, (2) boundaries, and (3) distractions. (153)

Employing the discipline of aloneness allows the spiritual leader to disengage from the world, but not escape it. In fact, aloneness becomes a key strategy in great leaders for their ability to have an impact on the world. Moses emerged from the wilderness to lead Exodus. David returned from the wilderness to become king. Paul ended his wilderness by launching his missionary journeys. On the cross, in the most profound aloneness the world has ever known, Jesus worked the salvation of the world. (160)

Great spiritual leaders bless people. Depending on their sphere of influence, the blessing may extend to those in their organization, their spiritual tribe, a region, an entire nation, the whole human race—whoever populates their leadership constellation. Great spiritual leaders are not just given to great issues; they are given to people. In the end, this capacity to bless is the deciding category that elevates them to greatness in spiritual leadership. The spiritual enterprise is about enhancing peoples' lives. God is in the people business. (161)