

AWAKEN THE LEADER WITHIN: HOW THE WISDOM OF JESUS CAN UNLEASH YOUR POTENTIAL-A BOOK REVIEW

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Many scholars writing on the topic of leadership focus on 1) character traits, 2) servant-hood, 3) personality, 4) values, 5) habits, and 6) principle. Perkins looks at it from the expressed behavior and concept of Jesus of Nazareth. Perkins in the book *Awaken the Leader Within* believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the perfect exemplar of leadership, which I will refer to as the leadership guru. The book uses a plethora of illustrations from the behavior, expressions, and paradigm of Jesus to explain true or genuine leadership. It is a case study of the life and practices of Jesus, with historical narratives from various scholars, executives, and personal narratives. The book employs the same premise of constructivist epistemology by way of utilizing a phenomenological theoretical framework and this showed the artistry of Perkins in writing from this perspective, while maintaining the scientificity of the material. *Awaken the Leader Within* is a spiritual trajectory of issues that concretize servant-hood and how Jesus of Nazareth epitomizes such a characteristic more fittingly than any other person who has lived on earth. The book is divided into two main categories-Part I-Awaken Your Character and Part II-Awaken Your Skills. Each part is sub-divided into seven chapters of 192 pages. It is in keeping with the sociology of leadership, values, character of effective leaders, and how servant leadership as epitomized by Jesus of Nazareth should be the ideal and new paradigm in leadership in all social systems.

Perkins commences the book in this way, "Former United States President Dwight D.

Eisenhower defined leadership as 'the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it' (p. 13) and this sets the tone for the rest of the book. The author also argues that this is his favorite definition and that Eisenhower's perspective has two tenets: 1) the leader has influence as he/she is able to get people to do things and 2) leaders are nurtured and not born. Perkins recognizes the two schools of thought on leadership, nature and nurture, but having believed the latter sets out to justify his thinking. Perkins opines, "Learning to lead is like learning to master a musical instrument-there are fundamental chords that can be studied, practiced, and mastered" (p. 14). He continues, "Becoming an effective leader demands rigorous study and hard work" (p. 14). The author then introduces the leadership style of Jesus of Nazareth as the exemplar of an effective, great and ideal leader. Perkins argues that Jesus of Nazareth is the most effective leader in history as his followership has exponentially grown and continues to grow each year, unlike none other before or after him.

Perkins believes that the leadership guru blends character and competence in his style of leadership and that they should not be separated (p. 15). The author contends that character is equally important as competence and that both must be developed by the individual. Perkins writes that of a research by James Kouzes and Barry Posner of some 1000 surveyed respondents, the study reveals that honesty and integrity are atop the list of desired characteristics of a leader (p. 18).

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He continues that of the two characteristics more valued by people, integrity is the foundation of leadership and that this determines the success or failure of a leader. To emphasize the issue vividly, Perkins writes "Leaders of integrity aren't like a weather vane that changes direction with every shift of the social winds" (p. 19) and that "They keep promises even if it means a financial loss...Leadership of integrity doesn't switch masks to win the favor of the audience to which they're playing" (p. 19). Using narratives between the author and Brad, Brad indicates "You know Bill [author], only one man possessed perfect integrity. He's right, of course...we need to let the example of Jesus show us what integrity looks like and how it can be cultivated in our lives" (p. 19). Such character ethic, integrity, is lived out by good leaders as in the case of Abraham Lincoln outside of Jesus (p. 20). To illustrate the integrity of Lincoln, Perkins writes:

Lincoln sent a letter to Allen with this exhortation: "That I once had the confidence of the people of Sangamon, is sufficiently evidence, and if I have since done anything, either by design or misadventure, which if known would subject me to a forfeiture of that confidence, he that knows of that thing, and conceals it, is a traitor to his country's interest [1 (p. 21)].

One thing that repeatedly frustrated Jesus' enemies was their inability to catch him doing something wrong. While Jesus often disregarded their customs and ignored their prejudices, they never heard him lie or saw him cheat [1 (p. 21)].

The author believes that both Lincoln and Jesus of Nazareth who were men of high integrity, opened themselves to people's scrutiny, and were accountable and responsible to themselves and the public, and they lived by integrating ethics in all areas of their lives. Perkins warns against false impressions, including errors by omission-unethical practice (p. 22). "In an effort to strengthen our credibility we communicate an exaggerated level of honesty, care, commitment,

and knowledge. We pretend our strained marriages are healthy and our voracious appetites are under control" Perkins says [1 (p. 22)]. Those creations are honesty and integrity as these cannot be substantiated and declared to be true and that people should be honest as to whom they are (p. 23). The author shows his vulnerability and character when he postulates, "What would a leader of integrity do when he realized he had lied? It took every ounce of resolve I possessed to peel back the mask and reveal the ugly man hiding underneath it" (p. 24). Perkins perspective indicates that even if self-image is going to be eroded by the acceptance of an error, lie or falsification of information, a leader of integrity will do the honest thing irrespective of the consequences and let the chips fall where they may. Hence, a leader of integrity has to cultivate this character and this will be repeatedly tested and retested on a regular basis (p. 25). Jesus of Nazareth laments the hypocrisy of some people and gap between their character and pronouncement about a character, this way:

You are like whitewashed tombs, which looks beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (Matthew 23: 27-28) [1 (p. 29)].

Jesus of Nazareth is of the view that people's projected character must be the same as their lived character, irrespective of whether people know or not-avoid hypocrisy. Although Perkins extensively argues about the value of integrity to the leader, he contends that effective leadership requires much more than that to include a vision (p. 30). All leaders are visionary people to include Walt Disney (p. 32); Candy Lightner-mother starts Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD; p. 33); Jesus of Nazareth (p. 37, 43); Martin Luther King, Jr., (p. 41, 105); James Dobson (p. 105); the author (p. 40), and that all those effective leaders

and others have a 'Blow Your Socks Off Vision' (p. 41). Martin Luther King's Jr. 'Blow Your Socks Off Vision' is "...an America where his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by their character" (p. 41). Perkins offers that we should border our drive, passion and vision based on the leadership guru's pattern and practice, Jesus of Nazareth (p. 41)-because He [Jesus of Nazareth] was "the greatest leader of all time" (p. 41) and that we should emulate Him.

Perkins believes that a leader's vision comes from his/her core values (p. 35). In discussing the core values of leaders, the author argues that practice of the leader is driven by his/her values. So he contends that both concepts are not congruent as a practice is "...an activity or action that may work in one situation but not necessarily in another" (p. 35) and a value "...applies to every situation" (p. 35). Having stated the distinction between the aforementioned concepts, he also went on to distinguish between values and principles. Perkins writes that a principle is "...external truth that is as reliable as a physical law such as gravity" (p. 35) and that they provide a guide to understanding and interpretation of things. He continues that "A value, then, is an internalized principle that guides our decisions" (p. 36). The discussion, then, proceeds to values and core values (p. 36). Core values are those values that drive a behavior, desire, and dream and are enduring. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, his core values were love of God and for men (p. 37) and that these will never change. While I concur with the author that core values are constant, stationary, and fixed, I somewhat divert from Perkins on the conceptualization of principle. For example, Covey says: "Principles are not invented by us or by society; they are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and human organizations" [3 (p. 18)]. Principles are, therefore, laws that are embodied into theories and discoveries such as gravity and relativity; they are also guidelines for human existence.

There are some principles that explain an effective leader. The principles are 1) visionary leaders committed to serving others (p. 34); 2) visionary leaders, having core values and a vision (p. 35); 3) visionary leaders, having a driving purpose that they express to others (p. 38), and 4) visionary leaders, having a clear 'Blow Your Socks Off Vision' (p. 40). This takes the discussion toward leading by charge (p. 45). Perkins believes that a barrier to the exploring values, core values, is fear because it retards the potential of people including a leader, and hampers courage (p. 46). The author, then, points to the leadership guru's exemplar of courage in the face of death. Perkins opines that Jesus of Nazareth was able to lead with courage and that "...his actions give principles that will equip us to lead the charge in the face of fear-provoking circumstances" (p. 46). How Jesus of Nazareth overcame the fear was simply to concentrate on the core values and his driving principles and not the issue of the fear. "If you know that a decision supports your core values and driving purpose and will help you accomplish your Blow Your Socks Off Vision, then you must have the courage to make it, even if you fear the consequences of doing so" Perkins says [1 (p. 47)]. Like Jesus of Nazareth, Perkins forwards that courageous leaders focus on the purpose of their vision and as such 'failure is a seed of success' (p. 49), preparation is a critical ingredient to overcome fear (p. 52) and God's presence (p. 54). Perkins notes that historically God prepared many of his leaders with various trials, and spoke with them when they lacked courage, or feared adverse situations or obstacles. The example given was Moses who feared the Canaanites (p. 55). The author believes that when one's faith in God is nurtured, the leader will develop boldness and that he/she will be dependent on God and not himself/herself (p. 56). An expression of potency by Perkins is, "Your own courage as a leader is crucial to the success of the team you lead. With that truth in mind-raise the flag, and lead the charge!" [1 (p. 56)]. This courage can be had with a belief in God,

trust in God. To understand the influence of trust in an outside agent, Perkins notes that we unlock our power when we place trust in another person and by extension God (p. 58, 59). One's faith in an outside agent, God, does not mean the individual will not face his/ her fear. In fact, even, Jesus of Nazareth faces his fear of death and this is recorded in Hebrews 5: 7, when the disciples heard his plea for God to let the cup [death] pass if it was possible (p. 62). Perkins argues that leaders must not create a face of invincibility; but let their followers see their weaknesses, vulnerability and fears as was the case in Jesus- Jesus hid nothing because of his belief that God sees everything, even in the dark or your private lives. The author, then, contrasted the perspective of Jesus with that of President Bill Clinton on the Monica Lewinsky issue (p. 66). The denial by Bill Clinton was considered as regrettable and is not in keeping with a leader of exemplary character.

What destroys many people is habit, how to change them and fear of the unknown. Perkins forwards that power exists in accepting Jesus of Nazareth as your personal savior to change habits (p. 96). The emphasis of the power of God, with a belief in Jesus, is expressed in this statement "As we apply what we're learning, we'll take the fresh insights about the benefits and consequences of our choices and develop a strategy to help us tap into God's power" (p. 98), which is the source from which the power to overcome habits will emerge. He continues, Jesus told his disciples that the awe-inspiring power of God is available to us right now through faith. Jesus is not only present when we need him; he's willing to infuse us with his strength and to fortify our character [1 (p. 98)].

Clearly from the aforementioned perspective, we need an outside source to build character, will and courage over fear in time and that change is not simply because we desire it because old habits are difficult to break. Hence, we need a perspective, power and presence to overcome

our old habits. Perkins believes that those elements are crucial to change and build character and constrain reckless practices that will hinder that 'Blow Your Socks Off Vision' (p. 99). It is not only character that produces a great and effective leader, it is also building competence.

The 'Blow Your Socks Off Vision' has been found to be in every inspirational leader. Perkins contends that success breeds life in a vision and the leader inspires people to frame and fulfill his/her vision, which was expressed by the actions of Jesus of Nazareth (p. 103). So Perkins contends that there are three principles of inspirational leaders. The principles are 1) focused-Robert Ballard wanted to find the Titanic (p. 104); Martin Luther King, Jr.-racial equality (p. 105); James Dobson; Hewlett-Packards to build printers (p. 105); Jesus-leadership by character and servant leadership (p. 106); 2) optimistic-Perkins notes that he/she must have an optimistic view of failure (p. 108); optimistic view of success (p. 110); optimistic view of challenges (p. 111); 3) preparation-inspirational leaders prepare themselves for the vision including Pat Riley, basketball coach of Los Angeles Lakers, prepares the team members for winning and having a vision of winning of the Championship (p. 113) and Jesus of Nazareth-he knew the Old Testament and so when he was asked he was able to ask profound questions that startled the people including Satan (p. 114).

Interestingly, values are important; but Perkins believes that people must let their decisions be empowered and express their core values (p. 119). He shows how every decision of Jesus was an expression of his core values and he was not distracted by secondary issues, and less important things. As a result one's decision must not be made on personal power, greed, wealth, prestige, image and influence-position (p. 120, 122). Whenever people take decisions based on greed and personal desires, they will abandon their core values and that is far removed from the

exemplar's behavior, Jesus of Nazareth (p. 120). On the other hand, one's decisions should be made based on a driving purpose (p. 124), which is demonstrated by Jim Casey (p. 125) as well as tapping into the external source of your souls, God (p. 126). The example given about tapping into the external source of our souls is when Jesus stayed up praying all night because he was going to be faced with a critical decision to make.

"I have a confession to make: I did not pursue a leadership role because I believed it was the way I could best serve other people" Perkins opines [1 (p. 175)]. He writes, "It wasn't the thought of serving that captured my imagination, but a vision of the future and a desire to rally others around that vision so that together we could bring it into reality" (p. 175) and this offers the real purpose of leadership and not power-over people. The leader's purpose is to empower others, inspire them to reach for the star, a vision, and take them there if they did not recognize his/her vision, initially. If the leader is a servant, his/her primary purpose is to motivate by compassion (p. 178). A servant leader is not offended by the rise of a 'second-string player' (p. 180). The servant leader must do the unexpected by serving others, serving strategic leaders. Perkins gives this example that captures unexpected service of a leader, "The man who supervises the company parking facility doesn't expect the chief executive officer to show personal interest in him by asking him about his family" (p. 184) and when the leader does he is serving the unexpected and inspiring those below him as they would believe they are of value as any other person in the organization. Another example is, "None of the disciples expected Jesus [of Nazareth] to take off his robe, wrap a towel around his waist, fill the basin with water, and begin to gently clean their feet (John 13: 3-5)" [1 (p. 185)] and this is service beyond self even to the least expected person, servant leadership.

The author makes a profound statement that totally captures my mind and quickens my

interest to understand the importance of change in my personal life and it is "The world is changing so fast that in the early part of the twenty-first century there will be only two kinds of leaders-'the quick and the dead' [1 (p. 186)]. The matter is indeed complex as a leader needs to comprehend that if he/she does not change with the reality of the time, he will be left behind, he will be dead. On the other hand, a leader who understands, values, implements and embraces change will be quick to deal with the future and followers will be quick to recognize the vision of the leader as being relevant for the time and ahead; because the leader cannot wait for change, resist change owing to uncertainty, lose personal power, as he/she "...must seize the opportunity and bring about the changes you want. The great English playwright and poet William Shakespeare wrote of strategic moments that must be grabbed at once" [1 (p. 162)], which is a hallmark of a great leader. One of the hallmarks of a great leader is a vision, changing the present, by describing a futuristic position that may be unthinkable to his/her followers as in the case of Disney, creator of the Amusement park in Orlando; Jesus of Nazareth conceptualizing the rise of the Church.

The entire book uses Jesus of Nazareth as an exemplar of a leader, servant leadership, and provides extensive illustrations in which Jesus served people. "As I examine the life of Jesus I'm disturbed, no, not by him, but by the gap that separates me from him" Perkins writes [1 (p. 175)]. Perkins' perspective is primarily interpreted within the context of the exemplar. The gap to which Perkins refers can only be narrowed based on first acceptance of the Jesus model, and secondly by way of rigorous hard work to address the disparity. "The leadership style of Jesus, which serves as the basis for this book's teaching, isn't based on fantasy, positive thinking, or feel-goodism. It's based on a life that demonstrated honesty, vision, sacrifice, and love" Perkins says [1 (p. 14)] and this is what people

should hold as the milestone for an effective and great leader. Despite the efforts of humankind to practice Jesus' model, the reality is not an easy one and requires a power beyond self that only comes from God. Jesus' character is beyond reproach as is demonstrated in the book as He displays integrity, honesty, patience, kindness, tenderness, compassion, forgiveness and love and these are the hallmark of servant-hood (p. 175-177). The author argues that servant leadership was the essence of Jesus' being and that we can model our character after his. So Perkins writes, "Wouldn't it be great if we could see this in Jesus and then immediately follow his lead!" (p. 171). What makes the surmountable difference between Jesus and us is the source (God). He relied upon for his actions and character, and we mostly act out of self. Perkins continues, "Unfortunately Jesus' example doesn't have the same kind of instant effect on most of us that two extra-strength aspirin have on a headache" (p. 177).

Not only did Perkins lament the role we play on this earth and how distant we are from servant-hood, likened to Jesus, but he believes that "...we'll ever feel we've fully arrived" (p. 177) and this should be resisted, because personal greatness is below required expectations of the exemplar, Jesus of Nazareth. The author argues, like Jesus, that we need to be filled with compassion with the needs of humankind and be moved into action to serve them (p. 179). "The act of service flowed from a heart of compassion. Jesus calls us to follow his lead and to cultivate compassion for those under our charge" Perkins opines [1 (p. 179)] and while this may be difficult, it must still be the gold standard. It will not be attained by personal might or will but by the spirit of God, which will be done through prayer. Using the exemplar's own practices, when Jesus had any major decisions to make he would first pray and request God's guidance and power to address challenges. In order to attain this, Perkins postulates that we need to loosen our resistance

and challenge our assumption (p. 164) in order to implement the required change as Jesus would have done (p. 167).

In conclusion, Perkins [1] provides avenues, approaches, philosophies and areas in which people can become leaders, nurturing leadership. He believes that leaders are nurtured and not solely created and operated by nature, and that the example for great and effective leadership can be compared to the exemplar of Jesus of Nazareth. While Perkins recognizes the difficulty to change old habits, he subscribes that "the secret to implementing successful change in your life is to focus on less, not more. Don't try to do too much. Focus on those specific insights that resonated with you-and diligently apply them" (p. 191) and this offers a broader perspective that change must be a gradual process more so with the help of an outside agent that is greater than the human expression, Jesus of Nazareth. To express this fittingly and rightfully, Perkins says "You see Jesus does more than point the way for you to follow. He wants to empower you to be a better leader...the greatest leader of all time offers you more than his wisdom; he offers you himself" (p. 191) and which better example is there to follow than the life and practice of Jesus. The book is profoundly about servant leadership from the perspective of the leadership guru, Jesus of Nazareth. It is a book worthy of your life, insightful and inspirational, with guidelines for effectiveness and greatness in personhood and leadership.

REFERENCES

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