

## **Book Review**

### **William D Taylor, *Leading from Below: Lessons from the Crucible of Global Mission***

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The author, William D. Taylor, has served as a global mission leader, having been the General Secretary of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship for three decades. Earlier, he served as a cross-cultural missionary in Latin America. With his rich experiences, education, and reflection on his life and the global changing context, he has written this book. The author considers the readers who could benefit as short-term missionaries, long-term missionaries, entrepreneurs or starters, builders, and those who wish to use their skill sets in a cross-cultural context.

#### **False Sacrifices**

The author warns about neglecting family or sacrificing family at the altar of ministry. The author failed to understand his wife as a ‘true missionary.’ Who has left family, home, culture, nation, language, friends, and community? That crisis helped him to repent and make amendments. He followed a principle not to accept an invitation before 24-48 hours, meanwhile listening to the Holy Spirit and his wife.

#### **Slippery Slogans (Doing Great Things for God)**

Moody Bible Institute has equipped many long-term cross-cultural workers throughout its history. Slogans and songs are essential for mission mobilization and preparation. Moody's slogan was, “The world is yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him” (12). Such slogans are created to motivate people, not to manipulate them. However, they are just slogans, not Scripture. There were four categories of missions: Go, Pray, Give, Send.

#### **Hagiographies of Biographies?**

“Tough, robust, true stuff continues to motivate people who are called to cross-cultural mission. Yes, ‘embrace the hard’.” (15). Missionary biographies were hagiographies, Evangelical saints were idealized as if they could do nothing wrong. The author writes that it is not possible to uncritically acclaim all they did.

Reflecting on his life challenges like broken aspirations, failure, limitations, sickness, and mission, the author writes:

I think the following components converged and called-drove-led us: the biblical basis of mission interwoven into all of Scripture; the Spirit’s invitation to join the triune God on his mission; obedience of some kind of ‘call’ or invitation and urging; human and spiritual needs; our discernment on vocation and occupation and geography-cross-cultural mission;

pragmatic, rational decisions that took us down that journey; finally, the willingness to pay that price (19).

### **Great Things for God**

Faithfulness, bearing lasting fruit, and pleasing the Father: “Our challenge is to live in tension, in paradox, to desire to give all to God even as we embrace the downward way of the cross” (22).

### **Deaths and Resurrection**

The author thought his entire life would be spent in Guatemala and die there. But God had other plans. Such dreams died, while new doors opened and unexpected opportunities and leadership came his way. New invitations stretched him to learn new skills, beyond his established skill set and gift mix. He experienced a triple death within the space of two years: “I would die to Latin America, then to form teaching, and later to the conviction that I could shepherd a congregation” (37). In all these, based on Isaiah 50:10, he writes: “I was learning to walk in darkness, unable to light my own lantern to illuminate my path”. (30) Then God orchestrated that he landed in a new role in global missions.

### **Four Primary Leadership Lessons**

The author summarises the leadership lessons from his life: 1) Never sacrifice your family. 2) God sovereignly schedules our assignments, and he may return us into a severe discipleship and deconstruction school to ensure we learn the right lessons. 3) God appoints leaders like David Howard and Theo Williams to shape us. 4) Jesus Himself was tested. When tested and tempted, look to Jesus as an example and advocate in the battles.

### **Two Paradigms of Global Missions**

There are two paradigms in missions. *First*, leaders like Art Glasser of Fuller Seminary: Go where the harvest is ripe. *Second*, leaders like Kenneth Pike, Summer School of Linguistics: Go to hard-to-reach small peoples without scripture.

### **Contextualization**

Theological seminaries transplant from the US: pot, soil, root system, and stem. The relevance of meeting the challenges of Latin America did not exist in the curriculum. How could an American-conceived seminary in Latin America be reengineered to reflect Latin history, culture, and education systems? Taylor had developed a mental concept, later named “contextualization.” Lausanne 1974 was a big shift in reflections about mission theology, contextualization, church, and mission.

### **Reflective Practitioner**

Listening, reflecting, evaluating, and being evaluated helped to become a reflective practitioner, a global missiologist, and an intentional mentor. “The world changed. My missional world was transformed. I was transformed. I am being transformed” (53). Taylor’s long missiological journey took him from the old binary mission to a mature mission movement, mutuality-marked, multi-based, and poly-directional.

### **Role Models**

“Unwittingly, our biological families impart systemic yet invisible constructs that shape, under-shape, and misshape us all” (57). The author’s father was an inspiration and role model; his thoughts helped in making many wise decisions. A reading habit shaped his life. From Urbana 1962, Taylor started reading newspapers and new magazines. He explored diverse categories of reading: serious study books, general information for growth, and different genres, including spy and deductive novels. He also had a preference to read several books by the same author.

### **Self-identification**

“Today I self-identify as a three-stranded Anglican follower of Christ: evangelical-rooted in Scripture, charismatic—empowered by the Spirit, and liturgical—sacramental in worship and life.” The author tells others: “I am a devoted follower of Jesus the Christ; many call us Christians” (61)

### **Always on Pilgrimage**

The author is concerned about the lack of vitality and vision in older churches. In a few churches a worship band has replaced a formal choir. Ralph Winter spoke about “modality and sodality,” which the author defines thus: “Modality refers to the gathered (the synagogue, ‘gathered’ church, local churches and denominations, WEA), and sodality relates to the scattered (the apostle teams, ‘scattered church,’ mission agencies, Lausanne and more)” (74). During his WEA years, Taylor experienced an amazing diversity of church structures, dynamics, internal government, vitality, and viability. Churches should be healthy, healing, teaching, and worshipping dimensions of diversity.

### **Quiet Time**

An important means of spiritual formation is a quiet time. God wants to have a personal relationship. “I understood a little about the Spirit’s multifaceted work, wrapped up in salvation, sealed, baptized, empowered for sanctification, and endowed with gifts (natural and supernatural) imparted to each believer the character, service, and mission” (84).

### **Sharing with Others**

The author developed five critical questions to ask all belief systems. These questions could be used to prompt discussions:

1. How do you explain the mystery of the created world?
2. How do you explain the mystery of a human person?
3. How do you explain the mystery of what's gone amok with humanity?
4. Which system has the best solutions to humanity gone rogue?
5. What’s the future of creation and of humans?

### **Reaching Animists**

Western missionaries failed to reach animists with the gospel. There is Gwandara ethnic group; the word literally refers to ‘a people who prefer to dance over religion’ (95). One organization was determined to dance the biblical narrative to them.

## **Blindness**

The author talks about blindness in five areas in his mission career:

1. The theoretical supernaturalist
2. No theology of social justice
3. No vision of mission from Latin America
4. No theology of Arts—in mission or vocation
5. No theology of creation care

## **Learning from Difficult People**

There are difficult leaders, bull-headed ones, insecure, wounded, immature, and selfish. The author was nudged by the Spirit to extend generosity and grace to some. It is possible that an old dog can learn new tricks. “Tension existed between rural and urban members, the former considering themselves the real missionaries. A different strain emerged between those in institutions and field people, between the seminary and other training centres” (142). The author learned to ask for grace and space, as well as forgiveness from difficult people.

## **Loneliness**

Taylor cites such bad experiences as elders betrayed, the divorce of a colleague, conflicting priorities that split a family, addiction to travel that split a family, and loneliness. Some were career climbers, manipulators, wounded, angry, or downright obnoxious. “It seemed that the higher one ascended, the scarcer the oxygen, the fewer the friends and rarer the accountable community” (144).

## **Potential Leaders**

The author prefers to work with leaders who have the following ingredients: 1) tested spiritual maturity; 2) healthy marriages; 3) the fragrance of Jesus; 4) tangible accountability; 5) track record of suffering; 6) cultural intelligence; 7) servant heart; 8) grace of collegiality in team building; 9) awareness of hidden addictions; 10) gifted, but humble; 11) an intentional mentor; 12) the maturity to know when to leave graciously.

## **Accountability and Stepping Down**

Some issues require stepping down from leadership: loss or absence of accountability, abuse of authority and power, financial mismanagement, sexual sin, marriage breakdown, major doctrinal departure, destructive hidden addictions, borderline inappropriate behaviour, anger, narcissism, and general moral issues.

## **Restoration**

Fallen leaders could be restored. They need authentic repentance and a long-term restoration process.

## **Missionary Kids**

It is sad to see some children and grandchildren of missionaries stop following the Lord. “Children of Christian leaders are all under special attack. For many I pray and for some I weep as I pray” (149).

### **Surprised by the Gifts of the Spirit**

Reaching his mid-80s, the Spirit has endowed the author with tasks. As a globalized servant leader, Taylor has been involved in intentional mentoring, some teaching, and writing. Those tasks embody the spirit of fathering the mis-fathered-mothered or un-fathered-mothered. Intentional mentoring to equip others helps them to survive and thrive in a wounded and wicked culture. The worst is yet to come, so tough preparation is essential.

### **Mentoring Markers**

The author’s mentoring markers are intentionality, community, collegiality, continuity, long-term, commitment, vulnerability, honesty, confidentiality, confession, a safe space for laughter, tears, repentance, courage to speak and reprove, extended times of silence, *Lectio Divina*, evening compline, speaking healing words and touch, encouraging others to dig deeply into their private and secret lives and to study how their family system has shaped or misshaped them.

### **Finishing Well**

Three crucial decisions irrevocably shaped the author: conversion, invitation into mission, and life partner. He asks himself: Have I finished my earlier seasons well? His dad was a great leader, whose old shoes he keeps as a metaphor and model.

### **Final Words**

The author’s son David was asked what he would say to emerging leaders as well as veterans. His reply was:

1. Accept leadership roles as they come.
2. Measure your mentors by how they model the style of Jesus.
3. Serve in diverse areas: academics, volunteers, team members, and cross-generational relationships.
4. Be aware of temptations.
5. Discern your personal gifts.
6. Learn from leaders who are unafraid to mentor younger men and women.
7. Long-term service enables a greater perspective.
8. Learn all you can about leading from below.
9. Respect leaders with honest wounds and scars.
10. My good friends, always seek to grow. Love Jesus, emulate Jesus, study Jesus, study scripture, study history, study culture, learn to lead as you observe gifted women and men.

### **Long Obedience in the Same Direction**

We all desire as much as possible a painless, comfortable, and successful life. But we are called by Christ to walk a path overshadowed by the cross. It is long obedience in the same direction. Good leadership includes finishing well. Three central passions that guide the author: 1) Faithful to my wife; 2) Children: Dad did not sacrifice us on the illegitimate altar of his own ministry. 3) Die in faith, want to be sure of the core truth. At the end, God will evaluate not on the basis of performance, rather on integrity and faithfulness.

He sums up: “Accompanied by kingdom friends, I press on, ‘farther up and farther in’” (185).

### **Awesome Book**

This is an awesome book, as it is a reflection of a Third-Culture Kid, missionary, academic teacher, unsuccessful pastor, and global missiologist and strategist. He has woven a beautiful embroidery of theological education, cross-cultural missionary experience, pastoral challenges, leadership challenges, leading his family in this mission, and facilitating leaders in global mission. One missing element is a one-page timeline, as the writing is not chronological, and the author moves into flashbacks. It is an important book for all Christians, especially for young emerging leaders.

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