

COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

Bill Hybels* opens his moving book, Courageous Leadership, with a stretch from his ministry journey that absolutely shook him to the core. He writes: *“Ten days after the attacks on the World Trade Center Towers, I stood at the rubble at Ground Zero, overwhelmed by the aftermath of one of the most horrific events in history [picture] On that...morning of September 11, 2001, Manhattan, New York, became a war zone. The terrorists took no prisoners, held no hostages. Death was the only option they offered, so three thousand ordinary people died that day. [Hybels, invited to tour Ground Zero speaks of being led into ‘The Pit,’ “the area immediately surrounding the fallen towers”]. In the grim shadows of the huge cranes that slowly shifted scraps of twisted metal, rescue workers dug through the rubble, and bucket brigades passed pails of debris from hand to hand. The workers moved silently, listening...for the sounds—any sounds—of survivors.Words cannot convey, nor television screens capture, the enormity of the devastation I saw. [Hybels had expected the devastation to be big, like a pile of debris the size of a large football stadium]. My mental picture was big—and tragic—enough, but reality was a hundred times more tragic. A square mile of ruin. [Hybels was stunned by the relentless labor of the rescue workers—their hands bloodied in their search for another human body with breath still in it. He speaks of driving past a designated place “where family and friends were posting pictures of ones on a crudely constructed bulletin board”]. For Bill Hybels “the bitterest truth of all [was] that all this suffering, this holocaust, was caused not by a natural calamity or even some freak accident, but by the deliberate schemes of fellow human beings. No earthquake, no shift in geological plates caused this wreckage. No flood, tornado, or hurricane did this. The death and destruction surrounding me, were the direct result of the careful plans of people” [pp. 13-14].*

What blew Bill Hybels away was that he had come eyeball to eyeball with enormous evil. Paradoxically, against that horrendous backdrop of enormous evil, Hybels was assaulted with profound hope. Bill saw pastors and trained church volunteers meeting physical, material, and spiritual needs. He saw *“Ordinary Christ-followers [sitting] in restaurants, office buildings, and temporary shelters addressing with courage and sensitivity the deep concerns of the soul....They cried with people. They prayed with people. They listened. They embraced. They soothed”* [p. 16]. Unspeakable evil was swallowed up by blazing hope. It was then and there that Hybels heard ringing in his soul a phrase that had become his life mantra. *“The local church is the hope of the world. The local church is the hope of the world”* [p. 15].

The death, destruction, and chaos of 9/11 was horrible. But infinitely worse is the chaos of the Fall. Adam and Eve broke covenant with God and ate the forbidden fruit. That was Ground Zero, the center point of history's greatest catastrophe. We still feel today the shock waves of that original wreckage. In Romans 1 Paul speaks of a massive avalanche of evil. The evidence of God's wisdom and majesty addresses us everywhere in creation. But people suppress the truth in righteousness. *“They exchange the truth of God or a lie, and worship and serve created things rather than the Creator”* [Romans 1:25]. The Idolatry of vv. 18-23, leads to the Immorality (hetero & homosexual immorality) of vv. 24-28, leads to the Wild Pandemonium of vv. 28-32. This is the chaos of our culture. So who will deliver us? Romans 3-11 tells us Jesus will by His death, resurrection, reign and Spirit Outpouring. And who will tell the world of His triumph? The Church will! Romans 10:14 announces: *“How can they believe in*

Jesus if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news’ [Romans 10:14-15]. Jesus saves. Jesus rescues. And He has entrusted the message of His rescue operation to the Church. And now with all the Fallout of the Fall, with all the wreckage who will clean up the mess? Who will pluck human beings from the Ground Zero nightmare? You will, I will. We will! For the local church is the hope of the world. And what will stir, encourage, challenge, and mobilize the body of Christ to clean up the mess, to get the job done? It is leadership, bold, courageous, wise, and passionate leadership. Paul writes: *“In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; **if it is leadership, let him govern diligently**; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully”* [Romans 12:5-8].

I. COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP IS CARING VISIONARY INFLUENCE. Christian leadership consultant, John Maxwell writes, *“Leadership is influence-nothing more, nothing less”* [The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 17]. Having the title or position does not guarantee that you are having influence. You may have a label over your door, like pastor or Reverend or CEO, or Director. But that doesn't mean that automatically you have influence. It is said, *“He who leads and no one follows is only taking a walk.”*

Caring Influence. There are two words that Paul uses to describe this gift. In Romans 12:8 the gift of leadership [=proistamenos] refers to the ability to govern and care for the church. It may refer to one who presides over worship or manages the community affairs [James Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit, p. 251]. Much like a Father is called to bring discipline and order, but also tender loving care into the home, church leaders must father, must manage well the household of faith [1 Timothy 3:4; 3:12].

Visionary Influence. Paul uses another graphic term in 1 Corinthians 12:28 to describe this gift of the Spirit. The word there is *kubernasis* which means, “helmsman.” A helmsman is the one who steers a ship, he's the pilot, the sea captain, the one in charge of the direction, the order, the navigation of the church [**Picture, Rembrandt, Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee**]. The ship is an ancient image of the Church. Christ is in command of the ship, calming the storm; but he entrusts direction to the helmsmen, to pilot the ship and make sure it reaches its appointed destination.

Good leaders are visionary. Like a Pilot, they know where the ship is headed and they've mapped out with others how they're going to get there. Hybels writes: **“Vision is a picture of the (preferred) future that produces passion”** [p. 32]. Henry Ford pictured a Model T in his head. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. saw a new world where black and white children could play together on a seesaw. Racine CRC'S Mission and Vision statement read: **Vision Statement:** Delighting in God and Proclaiming the truth in love. **Mission Statement:** **We delight in offering ourselves wholly to God in worship; We delight in being transformed to be more like Christ; We**

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delight in sharing God's love with our neighbor. Here is the flood of Gospel joy spilling over in upreach (worship) inreach (personal transformation) and outreach (word and deed evangelism). There is much to commend those twin statements. And with whoever becomes your permanent pastor you may want to re-visit it. The challenge is to find the mental picture that will drive this powerful congregation into the future. What hill are we going to conquer? What strategic initiatives will become our food and drink for the next five years? Where is God leading us now? Leadership is caring and visionary influence.

II. COURAGEOUS LEADERS RALLY THE RESCUE WORKERS TO RISK AND SELF-SACRIFICE. Paul calls leaders in Romans 12:8 to "*Govern diligently.*" Or better to lead with zest, with vitality, with great eagerness, devotion and with passion. This zest, this passion injects momentum into an organization. It's what John Maxwell calls **The Law of the Big Mo** [pp. 165-174]. I noticed this in a NBA championship contest a number of years ago between the San Antonio Spurs and the Detroit Pistons, when players like Manu Ginobili [picture] would absolutely take over a game. When he would shoot from the three-point line, then next drive right to the basket, slipping through all defenders and dunk the ball the crowd would go crazy, and his over the top effort would take the team to a new level of energy. Commentators said Ginobili was a driver. Every organization needs a number of drivers who inject energy and passion into the entire organism. The Apostle Paul was such an energetic driver. So here with Rom. 12:1ff Paul is spelling out how we can reverse the Ground Zero catastrophe of the Fall. When Paul charges the Christians in Rome: "*Therefore, I urge you.*" The first word in the Greek, translated "*I urge you*" suggests the image of Paul as a general exhorting his troops before they go out to battle [Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, p. 375]. Perhaps you remember the true story of warrior William Wallace [Mel Gibson's character] of Braveheart fame [picture]. The rag tag band of Scots in the fields of Sterling were up against King Edward the Longshanks of England. Because the Nobles refused to take up their cause the Highlanders were losing heart and shaking in their boots. They wanted to go home. At that very moment William Wallace rode in with his band of warriors. There was blue war paint on their faces. They were ready for battle. Riding his steed back & forth in front of Scots, Wallace breathed courage into their souls. He said among other things, "*Every man dies...but not every man lives.*" He summons the Scots to risk and self-sacrifice. He calls them to fight for their freedom. He yells, the English "*may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom.*" He ends the speech. The men cheer and then fight for their people at the "*Battle of Sterling—a battle that begins the liberation of Scotland*" [John Eldridge, Wild at Heart, pp. 22-23].

Racine CRC. You are a great Church! You have what it takes to excel at worship, at care-giving, at small group life, at education and discipleship, at mission and ministry to the poor. And here in this flock are brothers and sisters of courageous leadership. Our culture is ground zero. There is plenty that is twisted and broken and fallen and messed up right at our door step. God is calling on us to roll up our sleeves and clean up the mess. Will you join the massive body of volunteers that Jesus is raising up? Will you use your voice, your resources, your mind, your heart for outreach, for ministry to youth Sunday & Thursday nights? In view of all Christ Jesus did for you on the cross, in the resurrection and through His Spirit Outpouring, will you rise up to the challenge to "*offer you bodies as living sacrifices?*" Or will

you stay passive in the pew? Courageous leadership is caring and visionary influence. It rallies the rescue workers to risk and self-sacrifice.

Ten years before Bill Hybels visited NYC Ground Zero he was sitting in a little restaurant during his summer study break and he wrote these words: "***The local church is the hope of the world and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders***" [p. 27]. In Christ unspeakable evil can be swallowed up with blazing hope. We need never despair. Christ will raise up the rescue workers through visionary leaders. And those rescue workers will reverse the chaos of the fall. Believe it! In Christ, the local church is the hope of the world.

*I realize that presently in many circles Bill Hybels, former pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, has become a persona non grata [totally disgraced] by his inappropriate behavior. I am embarrassed and so saddened by the fall of such a great warrior. So with using portions of his story and writings in this sermon should not be interpreted that I am whitewashing what he has done wrong. Nevertheless, it is still true that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. And by the way we are all crooked sticks. If God could only use straight sticks none of us would qualify!