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Prayer, the Common Denominator of High Impact Spiritual Leaders

Dave Earley

Over the past thirty years I have studied the lives of dozens of God's greatest spiritual leaders from Abraham to Billy Graham. It is my conclusion and conviction that prayer is the timeless, and often overlooked, secret to high impact spiritual leadership. Certainly courageous acts, fearless faith, spiritual gifts, and anointed abilities help make leaders spiritually influential. I agree that credible integrity, fervent passion, clear purpose, and wise plans are important. It is good to cast your vision, identify your values, and build your team. But the common denominator of great spiritual leaders and dynamic spiritual influencers down through the ages lies in their prayer lives. Prayer is the ageless act of highly effective Christian leaders. Prayer must not be slighted. Prayer must be prioritized and practiced to achieve maximum impact.

Prayer is certainly not the only act of leadership, but it is the indisputable common denominator of spiritual difference-makers in every generation and in any setting. I doubt that you can find a maximally effective spiritual leader in the Bible or in history that was not a person of prayer. This is the reality today as much as it was two thousand years ago. Listen to the voices of renowned authorities in the realm of spiritual leadership.

Henry Blackaby states, "More than any other single thing leaders do, it is their prayer life that will determine their effectiveness."¹ Peter Wagner said, "Great leaders pray!"² Charles Swindoll, best-selling author, mega-church pastor, and former President of Dallas Theological Seminary writes, "Prayer, I repeat, is absolutely essential in the life of a leader."³

Nineteenth century Christian leader Andrew Murray said that prayer in the life of the leader should be regarded "as the highest part of the work entrusted to us, the root and strength of all other work... there is nothing we need to study and practice as the art of praying alright."⁴

J.C. Ryle, another well-known nineteenth century Christian leader, writes:

I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, some unlearned...some were Calvinists, and some were Arminians...But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They all had been men of prayer."⁵

A study of the truly great spiritual leaders reveals that their gifts, talents, personalities, backgrounds, educational levels, and social status varied. But they all had one common denominator – they were people of prayer. I agree with J. O. Sanders who concluded, "The eminence of great leaders in the Bible is attributable to the fact that they were great in their praying."⁶

What would happen if you spent more time this week in prayer?

Notes

1. Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Nashville, TN: B&H

Publishing Group, 2001), p. 151

2. Peter Wagner, in George Barna, general editor, *Leaders on Leadership* (Regal, Ventura, CA: 1997), pp. 282, 295

3. Charles Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978), p.37

4. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), xii

5. J.C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 14-15

6. J.O. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), p .84

Dr. Dave Earley is an experienced pastor, small group leader, and church planter. He serves as the Chairman of the Department of Pastoral Leadership and Church Planting for Liberty Theological Seminary. He has authored ten books on subjects such as small groups, leadership, prayer, and the Christian life. www.daveearley.com This article is an excerpt from his new book *Praying With Giants: Prayer Secrets from the Greatest Spiritual Leaders in History* to be released this summer by AMG Publishers.