

Leadership Letter 23

(Note: this is the 23rd in a series of "Leadership Letters." You can read previous letters at our web-site. Go to www.GraceGlobalNetwork.org and look under the "encouragement" section.)

Finishing Well

Imagine you're running a marathon race. You've trained for months. You are prepared. The day comes and you are ready. The gun sounds, and you take off with hundreds of other competitors who all have the same goal: finish the race. At the 20-22 mile mark, you hit the wall, a phantom runners face that they must work through if they are going to finish well.

Years ago, one of the Olympic marathon runners finally finished the race – over an hour after all the other competitors had crossed the finish line. When interviewed afterwards about why he didn't just stop when the race was over, he wisely said, "My country did not send me here to start the race, but to finish it."

The Apostle Paul had a similar philosophy in the first century. He said,

You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, The Message).

Halftime

A decade ago Bob Buford wrote a book called *Halftime*. I read *Halftime*, benefitted greatly from it, and have talked to hundreds of people who have benefitted from it. Sub-titled "Moving from Success to Significance," the book gave language to people about how to structure the second half of their lives. It opened a door for people to begin thinking about the second half, how they would finish. Now Buford has written a sequel, *Finishing Well*. It tells the stories of sixty-two people who applied the *Halftime* principles to their lives and shows what can happen.

Buford said in an interview recently,

Peter Drucker, who is my mentor, said to me two years ago, 'Okay you've got this dust up in the air, and you've established the idea that people come to a mid-life and they have more than one life, but people don't have role models for doing this. The role model for our culture is: you go to school, you get a job, you do the best you can, you retire, and then you just go to leisure land and do the long goodbye. I don't think this is what this generation of people is going to do, I really don't think people are, the big buzz in the media is what are the boomers' going to do? Are they going to do like mom and dad, and go off to Florida, eat dinner at 5:30 in the evening, pull their pants up to here and play shuffleboard?'

Well, they're not, and Peter said go out and find the people who are making the second half work, and I came to call them the "code breakers." Peter told me that the distance between the best and the average is constant. If you raise the best up, the average goes up.

For example, when Roger Bannister ran a four minute mile in the 1950's, nobody thought that was possible for a human being to do, and about a week after he ran a four minute mile every high school miler notched up their time five or ten seconds. Within a year after that, thirty people had run a four-minute mile, and even two years after that, three hundred people had run a four-minute mile. So these people in this book that I set out to interview, he said go find those, and tell people about it in their words, and so they're the code breakers. They're the pioneer's, they're out ahead of the rest of us, and that's whom you learn from.

That guy has some real wisdom! I've got about ten different angles I could take from what he said in that interview, but here is what I'd like to say to you today: **it is the task and responsibility of the church to help these "second half-ers" finish well.** The greatest untapped resource of the church in the next ten or fifteen years is going to all the people who are finishing the first half of their life. The question is, do they want to just go to dinner at 5:30 and play shuffleboard the rest of their lives – or do they want to take a different approach and make their lives count?

Tapping in to the Resources

We have to tap in to the incredible potential of all these second half people. They are ready to give time, energy, resources and experience. They're ready to give it if we call them to it. If we don't call them to it, the call to play golf might win. We have to call them to it, and we have to engage them at a very high level. In other words, we have to call them to something that's challenging, that brings the best out of what they spent the first half of their life gaining experience to be able to provide.

Is there someone in your church who can pick up this call and run with it? I believe a volunteer revolution is right around the corner. After a while, the magic of doing another deal or buying another business wears off, and people begin saying "*Been there, done that, now what?*"

There are some great books being written on this subject right now. I'd start with:

Halftime, Bob Buford

Finishing Well, Bob Buford

From Success to Significance, Lloyd Reeb

Unlimited Partnership: Igniting a Marketplace Leader's Journey to Significance, Bill Wellons and Lloyd Reeb

Let me touch specifically on the last book I mentioned. It addresses a very specific niche that I am talking about in this Leadership Letter. A growing number of seasoned business and professional leaders want to use their skills and experience to make a difference for the Lord in their world, and one obvious place for doing so is through their church. But many feel stuck. They have no idea where to begin or who

to talk to. At the same time, pastors and church leaders long for their churches to make an even greater impact for Christ in their communities and around the world, but they lack the seasoned leaders and ministry models necessary to make it happen.

Unlimited Partnership is a “flip” book. It brings these two groups together. Read it one direction to understand the perspective of the pastor. Flip it over to comprehend the perspective facing the business or professional leader. Both viewpoints have been written to bridge the gap and bring both parties together.

God is going to hold us accountable with what we do with the resources He has given to us. Read through the New Testament and you’ll see the call of the church to be involved in changing people’s lives. Help them grow in Christ. Help them study the Scriptures. But take them the next step and show them how to serve others, how to make a difference in other people’s lives by using the gifts, abilities and training that they have.

We’re seeing this happen first-hand in SouthWest Florida – and it’s exciting. Linda and I lead a Community Group at our church. Dennis, one of the men in that group, is now in Cambodia for two weeks. He’s a former FBI agent who is investing his second half years in extending the kingdom around the world. Wally, another semi-retired guy in our church, is also on that trip. I’m always kidding him because he’s overseas more than he’s in the United States. But it’s because he is also captivated with the vision of finishing well and investing his life to make a difference. Our church has dozens of people who are beginning to live out the second half of their lives missionally. There’s a volunteer revolution going on today!

Bob Buford’s calling is to spend the rest of his life working on transforming the latent energy in American Christianity into active energy, and that’s what this volunteer revolution will do. Yes, it is about accepting Christ, and it is about studying the Bible, and it is about being in community with other believers. But remember Jesus’ Parable of the Soils (commonly known as the Parable of the Sower, but the emphasis really is on the four different types of soils). The fourth one – the one that multiplied 30-60-100 times – is the one Jesus singled out. Churches are not going to be credible to the broader public if they are not changing people’s lives.

The go-to place for creating a volunteer revolution is called the C-H-U-R-C-H. That’s the vehicle that God ordained to accomplish the task. What is your church doing *today* to recruit, train and commission these volunteers to be sent out to change the world?