

## **Building Below the Waterline: Shoring Up the Foundations of Leadership**

Gordon MacDonald  
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With a plethora of books available on leadership in today's market, this book on leadership makes a great contribution to the literature on the subject because its focus is more on the leader than leadership. Gordon MacDonald uses the illustration of the Brooklyn Bridge to demonstrate the need for character in the leader. He reports that the bridge took thirteen years to build and three years of that time nothing about the bridge was visible to the public. The engineer pointed out that the most important work was in building the bridge's foundations hundreds of feet below the water's surface. The author compares this "beneath the water line" to the need for an emphasis on the inner life of the leader.

This message is on point and very necessary in today's leadership landscape, both in the church and outside of the church. Too many leaders, even Christians, build a large ministry or church, but it collapses because the inner life cannot support the structure. Someone has said, "Don't build a ministry larger than the character base upon which it is built."

The author is Gordon MacDonald who is a highly respected author, speaker and teacher in the Evangelical World. He is Pastor Emeritus of Grace Chapel in Lexington, MA where he was senior Minister for twenty years. He is author of more than a dozen books, the most famous being, "Ordering Your Private World" (more than one and a half million copies are in print worldwide). Other books include: "A Resilient Life;" "Secrets of a Generous Life;" "The Life God Blesses," "Renewing Your Spiritual Passion," "When Men Think Private Thoughts,"; "Mid-Course Correction" and "Who Stole My Church?" He currently serves as Editor-At-Large for Leadership Journal. He and his wife, Gail, live in Canterbury, NH, and have two grown daughters and five grandchildren.

Reverend McDonald's academic achievements include a B.A. from the University of Colorado (1962) and an M.Div. from Denver Seminary (1966). Denver Seminary awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity in 2011 and Barrington College (which merged with Gordon College) awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1979. He was named Chancellor of Denver Seminary in 2011. He also served as interim president for the 2008-09 academic year.

This volume is true to its title in that it is filled with basic, hard-hitting lessons about building the inner life or soul of the leader. It is divided into two clear parts--the inner and the outer lives of the leader. The chapters under these two sections are more personal than practical (although they are practical) and as stated earlier, more about the leader than leading or leadership.

The chapters are not lengthy and deal with a basic focus on the leader and the inner life. This emphasis on the inner life reminds me of Parker Palmer's book, *The Courage to Teach*. Each chapter is carefully crafted by an author with an obvious amount of training and experience. It reads in a "Paul to Timothy fashion" or much like an elder sharing the wealth of knowledge with a younger person. Chapter titles indicate the direction of the Inner Life section: *Finding Your Center*; *Six Words to Live By*; *Monday Morning Restoration*; *The Private Times of a Public Leader*. Subjects under the "outer life" include: *The 3:00 Phone Call*; *When Things Get Ugly*; *How a Mighty Church Falls*; *Pastor's Progress*.

One of the most powerful parts of the book is found on page 43 under the title, *Searching Your Motivations*. Gordon talks about a crisis he experienced when he came face to face with his reason for being a minister. He stated that he was doing ministry in his natural giftedness. He began to examine his motivations for ministry and discovered what he called, "substandard motives."

He discovered several: The need for approval (not to please his mom); validation from achievement (why what we do is not good enough); the longing for intimacy (the desire to connect closely with people); the power of idealism (come to mid-life and discover motivations for ministry are inadequate).

This is a sample of what is contained in this small book. I recommend this book to all ministers for their personal growth and development, DMin directors, educators, and ministerial students.

This book is not designed to be a textbook, but is more a collection of lessons learned and thoughts needing to be shared. It is not designed to be used by ministers alone, but for anyone who answers God's Call.