

going private

by Greg Wiens



Ordering Your Private World

by Gordon MacDonald

Thomas Nelson, 240 pp. \$14.99

This is one of a few books that literally changed my life. Published over 25 years ago, it was a wake-up call to people of my generation not to focus on outward activity but rather on one's inward condition. As I work with many young leaders, I am struck how few grasp the importance of this concept for

leadership and ministry today. Bill Hybels said, "This book was the primary instrument that God used to motivate me to integrate spiritual disciplines into my daily walk with Christ. I shudder to think where I'd be today had I not read it."

That is why I have chosen to review this book—it is as relevant now as it was when it was first written. Shallow messaging is everywhere, from Andre Agassi's "image is everything" to the commonly bandied about "fake it 'til you make it". But today's young leaders haven't learned that long-term effectiveness will result from laying a foundation in their soul, unseen by the public eye.

MacDonald helps draw a distinction between our public world, seen by all, and our private world, deep within the crevices of our soul. If we live long enough, our private world will either undermine or undergird our public world. Any image can be maintained temporarily, but a shallow private world will eventually be shown for what it is. MacDonald deals with a number of critical concepts for every leader. Each is potentially life-changing. Below are a few of the highlights:

called vs. driven

Being "driven" is a quality that leaders today believe they must have to succeed. Driven leaders are put on pedestals as examples for emulation by those in the lower ranks. A "called" leader, however, will find more success in the long run. Because their private calling from God guides their steps in their public world, they more fully understand who they are because God has shown them first who they are not.

the curse of being gifted

Most things in life come easily to naturally gifted people. They do not have to work as hard to achieve the same results as others. While gifted young leaders may be early stand-outs, if they neglect their private world, they will be passed over later in life by others who have refined their abilities and disciplines out of necessity. They have greater strength of character in the long run.

readers are leaders

It was MacDonald who first taught me the importance of reading. I read a lot and I read widely. To stay sharp as a leader, learning must be continual. A leader is only as good as the past year's learning. Past books or ancient lessons are not enough to serve a leader for his or her whole career.

carpe diem

Un-seized time will be used ineffectively in your life. This book allowed me to see that I was a steward of God's resources and I needed to honor Him with how I invested them. For the first time in my life, I also realized I have a rhythm of life that is different from others. I found that I needed to plan my time according to how I best functioned throughout the day, week, month and year. I found that I needed time to rest. This revolutionized how I worked.

Each chapter in the book begins with a "Memo to the Disorganized". There is so much depth to each memo, but I've listed a few of the real gems:

memo to the disorganized: if my private world is in order, it will be because:

- I am convinced that the inner world of the spiritual must govern the outer world or activity.
- I make a daily choice to monitor its state of orderliness.
- I recognize my proneness to operate according to schemes and patterns not made of God but fashioned by a disordered past.
- I see myself as Christ's steward and not as master of my purpose, my role, and my identity.
- I have made a daily determination to see time as God's gift and worthy of careful investment.
- I have begun to seal the "time leaks" and allocate my productive hours in the light of my capabilities, my limits, and my priorities.
- I have determined that every day will be for me a day of growth in knowledge and wisdom.
- I have chosen to press Sabbath peace into the rush and routine of my daily life in order to find the rest God prescribed for Himself and all of humanity.

In some areas MacDonald is a bit obsessive. For instance, he says the condition of your horizontal surfaces in your life (desk, car dashboard, kitchen counters) indicates the condition of your private world. Though I agree with him in principle, I have not found it to be true in practice.

Over the past 25 years, I have seen the power of this book in the lives of young leaders. I have also seen it produce immense fruit in older leaders struggling with their internal stagnation, despite external busyness and activity.

Young leaders today believe that to be perceived as effective, they must Tweet, blog, and brand themselves for the world to approve. My fear is that they will altogether miss the crucial development of their private world, which is essential to support the public world.

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