

# ***Outliers: The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell**

Review by Dr. Greg Wiens

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Bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell is never content to accept the status quo, unconvinced that things are what they seem. In his first book *The Tipping Point*, he studied the small events behind epic phenomena, and in his second book *Blink*, he searched for the expertise within instinct. In his latest book, *Outliers*, he examines the stories of superachievers (think Bill Gates or the Beatles) for clues to the nature of success.

## **RECIPE FOR SUCCESS**

Gladwell's argument is that success is not solely based on talent. The successful are not necessarily "outliers" as Gladwell defines them: individuals exceptionally gifted beyond the normal range of experience and talent. They are, however, products of history, timing, luck, opportunities and of course, hard work. He builds his case compellingly, citing example after example of people who were not only talented, but lucky too.

As recipients of unique opportunities, heirs of cultural characteristics, and products of societal organization, these people had the presence of mind to seize the opportunities.

For example, most professional Canadian hockey players were born in the first quarter of the year. As children, they were placed into all-star leagues because they were older, bigger, and more coordinated. This advantage allowed them to more fully develop than those placed in lower leagues. Gladwell asserts that we lose more than half of the population's potential players this way.

Gladwell also cites the story of Bill Gates as evidence for his theory. Gates, along with most other computer entrepreneurs, was born between 1954 and 1956. Additionally, he attended a private junior high school that allowed him to cultivate his computer programming skills while few in the world had this opportunity. Once computers became more widely available, Gates used his specialized skills to his advantage.



Gladwell

*"Outliers are those who have been given opportunities, and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them." — Malcolm Gladwell*

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## **A CHRISTIAN LENS**

The implications of *Outliers* are significant for the Christian leader when sifted through the screen of God's providence. First, Christian leaders must develop clarity of mind and heed the Holy Spirit to be able to seize opportunities when they occur.

Second, Christians must understand that God chooses who and when he blesses with those opportunities. Too often the Christian community adulates its leaders who lead large organizations or author popular books, viewing them as "outliers", more gifted than other believers. These leaders are more than just products of elbow grease and ability, but recipients of opportunities and circumstances specific to them that other leaders did not receive. To Christians, these occurrences are not random as Gladwell states, but totally within God's purview.

Whether or not you consider yourself successful, *Outliers* will help you understand the circumstances and factors that have led you to this point in your life. The point is not whether others are more successful than you. The point is whether you have capitalized on divine opportunities placed in your path, a principle Christ teaches in The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

***Outliers: The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell  
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