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PREVAILING FAITH *The Extra Edge for Facing Risks*

Dale Galloway

Leaders in the business community constantly look for an extra edge for building great corporations that produce healthy profits. Daniel Goleman's writings on *Emotional Intelligence* and Jim Collins' concept of "level five" leadership in his book *Good to Great* offer some significant insights about the extra edge for business leaders. In similar ways, churches desiring to be all they can be keep looking for an extra edge to increase their effectiveness. Far from being new, taking full advantage of prevailing faith is our extra edge. Taking full advantage of prevailing faith fuels an attitude I see in effective churches that says, "We're willing to risk. We'd rather attempt something great for God than to do nothing at all—and succeed!"

Realistically, every great accomplishment for God involves risks for someone or some group. Interesting enough, for our inspiration as well as our challenge, we must realize every great accomplishment in Christian history stands as a silent witness to how much the Father honors prevailing faith in His children. Those who never risk never accomplish much for God. And at the end of their years of service, they look back with regret because, in an ultimate sense, playing it safe never satisfies.

Though not speaking directly to the church, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, has 12 brief words church leaders need to hear and heed, "The policy of being too cautious is the greatest risk of all" (John Woods, ed., *The Quotable Executive*, 197).

From my repeated devotional reading of Heb. 11 and 12, I have come to believe a two-word phrase—*prevailing faith*—sums up these lofty chapters. That’s the extra edge for a church and her leaders. Worthwhile risk plus prevailing faith add up to Kingdom achievement.

More than 150 years ago, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard came to a similar conclusion: “Without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk, the greater the faith” (Rebecca Davis, ed., *The Treasury of Religious and Spiritual Quotations*, 1994], 494).

Whenever you find a great church—a transforming church, a cutting-edge church—you find a leader and followers who through prevailing faith are willing to risk for God.

According to the Bible, our faith connected with God’s power produces extraordinary results. Many characteristics of prevailing faith almost jump off the pages of the Bible from Heb. 11 and 12. To achieve more for God, we need to deepen our understanding of prevailing faith. Do you have dreams to make your life and service for Christ really count but wonder how to do it? The following biblical principles will get you started.

1. The Prevailing Faith Leader Stays Focused on Jesus

The strength of our faith comes from Jesus, not ourselves. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that what Jesus did at the cross is our motivation for risking faith: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross” (12:2). Ponder the connection, if you can, between joy and enduring the Cross.

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I could be by my own efforts.*

Only by focusing our minds and wills on Jesus can we lead people beyond where they never dreamed they could go or help them see spiritual potential they’ve never imagined.

In partnership with Jesus, I become more, so much more, than I could be by my own efforts. In Christ I find the strength be-

yond my own to ask people to join me in doing things for God that I would never ask if it weren't for the all-consuming dream God has given me. In his book *The Arc of Ambition*, James Champy calls this "the enormous appeal of a worthwhile case" (118). Jesus is the ultimate attraction of His Church.

Is it not true that every effective leader sometimes feels inadequate? Moses felt deficient about his speech and his leadership. Yet God used him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Even though he felt incapable, he kept focused on God's enabling power. He learned that lesson well a long time before Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV). To this day, Jesus stands as a giant among the heroes of faith listed in Heb. 11. The effective church keeps focused on her living Lord.

2. The Prevailing Faith Leader Is a Visionary

Vision has always held high priorities for achievers—especially leaders in the Church. English poet, political writer, and clergyman Jonathan Swift, who lived near the end of the 1600s, said it in a short, timeless sentence: "Vision is the art of seeing things invisible." Carl Sandberg, the American poet who lived into the first half of the last century, adds another significant dimension to what it means to be a visionary: "Nothing happens unless there is first a dream." But beyond the insights of Swift and Sandberg, the writer to the Hebrews stretches our concepts when he ties vision and faith together: "Now faith is a substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (11:1, NKJV).

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picture attached.*

Vision is faith with a picture attached. The visionary leader sees what others do not see, sees before others, sees what may not even exist, and sees the results of following a vision. Authentic visionary leaders communicate a picture of a preferred future that people can see, believe, and support.

I remember sitting in a Denny's restaurant many years ago, along with Glen Cole and Denny Davis. All three of us were pas-

tors who were impacted by a young visionary leader named Robert Schuller. He had convened either the first or second Institute for Schuller Successful Church Leadership. Though only 75 church leaders attended, the conference provided a context that enabled us to dream and to verbalize it.

The three of us, who have since become longtime friends, shared our dreams that night. We talked about what a great church would look like. We made commitments that we were going to spend our lives bringing to reality the vision God had given us for building a great church. Twenty years later, God had done it. But first we had to see the picture of what could be.

At that same institute, my wife, Margi, also caught the vision for our work in Portland. I had resigned an established church and was dreaming of starting a new congregation to reach thousands of the unchurched in that great Northwestern city. As we sat in Schuller's Tower of Hope, I asked God to give Margi the vision for our future together. God answered that prayer, and we have become partners in the vision and its achievement across these years.

A few years later at yet another Schuller Institute, I recall sitting over coffee with Sundo Kim. He shared his dream for a great prevailing faith church in Korea. In the years that followed, he built what has become the world's largest church for his denomination.

3. The Prevailing Faith Leader Is a Pioneer

As a pioneer, the prevailing faith leader never settles for the status quo. Pioneers challenge processes, situations, difficulties, and present realities. They believe the church can be relevant, alive, and able to help sinners be transformed into saints. Like American frontier leaders, these spiritual leaders test boundaries and make amazing discoveries about God in the process.

Notice the cutting-edge, move-toward-the-future spirit of this verse: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8, NKJV). Though people of great faith do not always know where they're going, they know who they are going with. They know God is with them and that their dependence is Him.

Great automobile genius Henry Ford shared this insight from his own experience as leader in the auto industry: “One of the greatest discoveries a man can make, one of the greatest surprises, is to find he can do what he is afraid to do.” Pioneers discover that God is often ready to do through them what they were afraid to try by themselves.

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For a genuine pioneer, risking faith means leaving something to receive something better. Like the trapeze artist, one rope has to be released before the other one comes into our hands. One unknown writer called it the agony of the in-between life.

When I launched New Hope Community Church, it meant leaving friends, giving up material security, turning my back on the church of my childhood, and putting behind me many other things to which I was emotionally attached. But what an adventure! I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

Why not move ahead to reach to new horizons? Listen to your pioneer heart. And experience the thrill of being a person of prevailing faith.

May these words, that mean so much to me, become your heartbeat:

Grieve not for me, about to start a new adventure.

Eager I stand, and ready to depart,

Me and my reckless pioneer heart

—Author unknown

4. The Prevailing Faith Leader Is an Entrepreneur

Can you see and feel the entrepreneurial spirit in the following verse? “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3, NKJV).

God, the Master Craftsman, not only created the world but also invented creativity and imagination and the ability to dream

for Kingdom achievement. Risky faith was His idea long before any of us thought about it.

God shares His creativeness each time He uses one of us to develop something new. His shared creativity gives us new ways to reach people, new strategies for training leaders, or a plan for a new kind of worship service. To be a prevailing faith leader, we must seek and use the creative enablement of God in the details of our ministry assignment.

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For example, I learned new paradigms for evangelism, each of which helped me reach many more people than in my previous ways. As a young pastor, the only way I knew how to start a church was by holding revival meetings and knocking on doors. I went door to door inviting people to church, but I did not know how to talk with them on a one-on-one basis about spiritual things.

As I mention often in my writing and preaching, a creative entrepreneurial spirit started to develop in me when I tried to think of innovative methods of evangelism. It started one day when I met a Campus Crusade for Christ staffer at a nearby university who sketched on a napkin what many know as the “four spiritual laws.” That afternoon I went back to my suburb of Columbus, Ohio, and led two people to faith in Christ, using the napkin as my guide. This was a great new paradigm for me.

Recently when I visited that congregation, I met 25 families who came to Christ through my personal evangelism efforts in that congregation three decades before. What a payoff for implementing a “new” idea.

Later I learned about using small groups to reach people. The basic idea goes back to John Wesley, who shared his ministry with group leaders and in the process helped them grow strong spiritually even as they served others. The outreach potential and the discipleship possibilities of small groups are enormous.

At another time in my pastoral journey, I came across the idea of a “Pastor’s Welcome Class.” This class is for newcomers and outsiders who have little knowledge of the church. Over the years, I saw hundreds of people come to Christ through that class at New Hope.

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Create a climate in your church in which people are encouraged to be innovative and given the opportunity to carry out their dreams—and to try new ministries. Then many will be challenged and stretched. God will energize them. As a result, the church will prosper and grow. Prevailing faith creates churches that are spiritually strong and robust in winning new people.

5. The Prevailing Faith Leader Gathers People

If you want to build a great church, you must gather lots of people. You have to be consumed from early morning until late at night with a passion to reach new people and a commitment to strengthen the people of God. To build a great people-focused church, you personally must keep reaching out to individuals until you have assembled 400 to 500 people. The majority of your waking moments must go to thinking and asking, “How do we gather people?”

Once you have gathered that many relationally connected people who are excited about serving Jesus, they will spark outreach and momentum to bring in hundreds or perhaps even thousands more. Once you reach that critical mass level, the people become gatherers of other people.

At that point you must commit yourself to learn new skills of leadership, such as how to manage success. Then you’ll be forced to learn how to become more of a leader of leaders. Then you must be consumed with how to build the strongest staff possible.

God used Abraham’s faith to raise up descendants “as nu-

merous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore” (Heb. 11:12). Likewise, a crowd that is enthusiastic for Jesus can bring about a huge spiritual multiplication effect on their community.

6. A Prevailing Faith Leader Is Someone Willing to Pay the Price

There is no feast without a sacrifice. Those who have prevailing faith are leaders who have given up their self-centeredness for something greater and much more satisfying—the cause of Christ. There is no effectiveness without some pain and often even some controversy.

 *There is no feast without a sacrifice.*

God commends people who are willing to pay a price motivated by faith: “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead” (Heb. 11:4).

In Heb. 11 we’re reminded that Moses refused to live a life of ease by becoming the spoiled grandson of Pharaoh. He chose the more difficult way, and God honored his commitment, as He always does.

Abraham held nothing back from God. He obeyed God even to the point of being willing to offer Isaac, his son of promise, upon the altar of sacrifice.

In fact, any significant gain in life usually comes at some great cost to a leader. According to legendary Ohio State University football coach Woody Hayes, “There is nothing in the world that comes easy. There are a lot of people that aren’t going to bother to win. We learn in football to get up and go once more.”

That’s the way it has to be in the church too. The leader pays a price of running further and harder and longer. He or she pays the price of running faster and for making something significant happen. But there’s a rich payoff too. There’s nothing

greater than giving your life for the cause of Christ in building a prevailing faith church.

In ministry every effective pastor will be called to sacrifice, stretch, and grow. Let me explain why I believe this is true. I learned the hard way that I could never take the church to a new level of ministry without paying the price personally. Before I could lead the church deeper and further in the work of God, I had to go deeper in my own spiritual commitments, to develop new skills, and to release more authority to others.

I'm a much better Christian because of this Kingdom principle—each new level of ministry requires new levels of sacrifice and commitment of the leader. This is the delightful agony of achievement in the cause of Christ.

When my wife, Margi, and I were preparing to start New Hope Community Church, we had no outside backing. So I made a list of possibilities of people who might help us. I took my little green notebook that contained 23 names and visited each person to cast the vision and ask their help. When I was done, I still had no money. Not a single person had made a commitment to help when we started.

I had to make a decision about what to do. The problem was a lack of funds, but that was different from the decision I needed to make. Margi and I backed off and prayed, *Father, are You calling us to start a new outreach-focused church to reach the unchurched thousands of Portland with the positive, life-changing message of new hope in Jesus Christ?*

The answer was yes, but we didn't know how. Then we began thinking about our house. Margi's family had always lived in a parsonage. Our little "honeymoon cottage" was her first home. We had about \$7,000 in equity in it. We sold and used the equity as our financial launch resource.

7. A Prevailing Faith Leader Is More like a Hedgehog than a Fox

In Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, he tells about Latvian-born English philosopher Isaiah Berlin's famous essay "The Hedgehog and the Fox." In the essay the author divides the world into hedgehogs and foxes based on an ancient Greek parable.

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing—that the fox is coming!” writes Berlin.

The fox is a cunning creature able to devise many sneak attacks on the hedgehog. Day after day the fox circles the hedgehog’s den, waiting for the perfect moment to pounce. Fast and crafty, the fox looks like a sure winner.

On the other hand, the hedgehog looks like a sure loser. He waddles along, going about his simple daily tasks, searching for lunch, taking care of his home.

The fox thinks he’s got him as he comes bounding across the ground in speedy pursuit. The hedgehog, sensing danger, looks up and says to himself, *Here we go again—will he ever learn?* Rolling up into a perfect little ball, the hedgehog becomes a sphere of sharp spikes pointing outward in all directions.

 *That's the highly desirable effect of focus for the church—direction, concentration, and desirable outcome.*

Racing toward his prey, the fox sees the hedgehog’s defense, calls off the attack, and retreats to the forest to calculate a new line of attack. Each day some version of this battle takes place. Despite the greater cunning of the fox, the hedgehog always wins.

Then Jim Collins asks, “Why does the hedgehog win?” (90-91). Its secret is focus.

Management specialist Ken Blanchard and Coach Don Shula have a lot to teach the church in what they say about focus in football: “Like those river banks, a good coach provides the direction and concentration for performers’ energies, helping channel all their efforts toward a single desired outcome” (*The Little Book of Coaching*, 15). That’s also the highly desirable effect of focus for the church—direction, concentration, and desirable outcome. Churches and spiritual leaders who are focused accomplish more and enjoy increased satisfaction in the process.

Sometimes people ask me how I created 500 small groups in a single church. Researchers say it was the largest number of small groups in any individual church in North America at that time.

I didn't do it in a day, a month, or a year. It took 23 years of focus. It started simply: I started a group, and my wife, Margi, started a group. We raised up leaders out of those groups and helped them start more groups. Out of those groups came more leaders, who started even more groups.

We experienced the cycle of accumulative effective service of Christ. New people would enter the groups. They would become Christians. They would become apprentice leaders. They would become leaders and start reaching new people through their new groups. I did that every day, week, and month. I added staff people who made leadership development their focus, and they kept at it year after year. There are many things in life I will never know how to do, but I do know how to stay focused. Like a magnifying glass lined up focused on the power of the sun, you can start fires all over. The power of focus produces amazing results.

Andy Stanley pastors North Point Community Church in northwest Atlanta. His leadership is an example of prevailing faith as he led his church to focus on what they call alignment. They know who they are and what God has called them to do. They continually ask, "Does this idea of potential new ministry align with our vision?" As a result, they focus on a few things that they do well. They say no to a lot of other opportunities. What they say no to gives them as much focus power as what they accept.

8. A Prevailing Faith Leader Is a Team Builder

To build a prevailing faith church, leaders have to work with others to build community and multiple ministry. An effective prevailing faith church is built by a team who work together—it is the gospel lived out in relationships and the gospel shared with those who do not yet know Christ.

Though he was not writing specifically for Christian readers, Lawrence Holpp offers an important directive for those who want to build a church team: "We all know what the word team means—'a number of individuals associated in some joint ac-

tion,' the dictionary informs us. So we may not think any further. That's a big mistake. A team should be defined in terms of purpose, place, powers, plan and people" (*Managing Teams*, 4). And he's right. Any group who gives attention to those five words is well on its way to significant achievement as a team.

If God has given you a vision for the future achievement of the church you serve, you cannot achieve it alone, or else the dream is not big enough. Every vision from God is dependent upon your ability to build a team. The spelling of the word "team" could be viewed two different ways: Together Everyone Achieves More, or Together Everyone Achieves Miracles. Either way, the importance of a team idea gets communicated to the congregation. We really do need each other.

9. A Prevailing Faith Leader Finds Ways to Be an Overcomer

In addition to the call for adventure and the strength to overcome, Hebrews 11 contains a sobering message. Verses 36 to 38 describe the terrible opposition faced by people of faith—from jeers and flogging to death itself. They suffered, according to Scripture, to obtain "a better resurrection" (v. 35).

 *It's not what happens to you in the journey, but what happens inside of you.*

Like them, you will face obstacles, maybe not death or physical abuse, but changes that have to be renegotiated over and over again. These are frustrations that have to be endured in order to accomplish the mission.

God inspired Millard Fuller to create a whole movement to help poor people. He founded Habitat for Humanity, an organization that has built more than 100,000 homes for people who did not have a home previously. He says the organization is all about putting Jesus' love into action. Though I never met Millard Fuller, I have talked with enough leaders to be confident that Habitat for Humanity, like every Kingdom-related organization, has hit snags, obstacles, and even dead ends.

The more worthwhile your dreams, the more setbacks you will face. How you handle foot-dragging and attacks will determine more of your effectiveness in ministry in the long run than anything else you do. It's not what happens *to* you in the journey, but what happens *inside* of you. God uses the testings to refine you and develop you for an even greater future.

Those with prevailing faith learn to hold steady in the storm.

When I was 10 years old, I went on a fishing trip with my family to Minnesota. One day the men went about 30 miles out with a guide. That day my job was to remain local and stay with my mother and three other women who appointed me boat captain to take them fishing.

We went a couple of miles out on the lake, and a terrible storm hit. The waves began rolling into the boat, and I became scared. My dad had taught me not to panic. You head the boat into the waves toward the shore. The women were praying, and I was shaking, but I kept it steady until we reached the shore safely.

In ministry, storms hit you. They come by way of staff difficulties, leadership issues, financial crises, or any number of other frightening winds. In the first eight years of ministry at New Hope when we rented facilities, we were sold out of one place, burned out of another, and kicked out of two others.

What I learned: In every adversity, look for the hidden opportunity. The Adventist church building that we were using in the early days of New Hope Community Church had a fire and became unusable. We needed a new place immediately. I had been in discussion with a local college to use their chapel, but the president wanted a lot more money than we could pay. After the fire, I called the president and told him our sad story of needing a place to go. That very week, he opened up an auditorium at a very affordable price.

Years later, after weathering several relocations, we had grown to be able to buy some property. We made a long wish list: on a major highway, a beautiful location, near a population hub, and more. We found a 20-acre spot that we could purchase for only \$29,000 down. Our people sacrificed and came up with the money, and we were thrilled. Then we met with the local

zoning board, and they absolutely refused to allow us to build a church facility. We took them to court, and we were still voted down.

God, where are you? we asked.

One day a lady called me and told me about her beautiful house. “We’re moving, and my husband and I think a preacher should live there,” she said. “We think that preacher should be you.”

“I don’t have any money,” I replied.

“Just come look at it,” she said.

We looked at it and loved it but still did not have any money. I went to bed praying about it and in my sleep came up with an idea. In the morning, I asked her if she would take a note—an IOU that we would pay in four years. She said yes, we moved in, and we were very happy.

As I drove away from the house each day, I kept seeing a certain tract of land along the freeway. It was on a lush, green hillside. It was directly across from a busy mall, which gave the property high visibility to thousands every day.

Who could dream of a better location?

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I inquired about who owned it. A little later I was a speaker at a banquet and found myself sitting next to the uncle of the property owner. I asked him to make an appointment with his nephew for me. He did.

God enabled our congregation to buy that property totally on options—on the promise that one day we would start paying for it, which we did. We sold the original 20-acre property and used the proceeds to help pay for a portion of the land we had on option and built our first multipurpose building.

God provided us a striking opportunity in the middle of adversity.

10. A Prevailing Faith Leader Endures

God encourages us to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Heb. 12:1). By God’s standards, every starter who endures is a winner. God’s winners in Heb. 11 and 12 didn’t give up the faith. They kept at it. They were steadfast and unmovable. They did what they could and counted on God to supply what they lacked. Because of their unwavering faith, they’re listed in the Bible’s “hall of fame.”

We all know there are few guarantees in ministry. “We conquer by continuing,” says George Matherson. And Josh Billings, American humorist of the 1800s, adds his advice: “Be like a postage stamp. Stick to one thing until you get there.”

One of my Beeson Pastor Doctor of Ministry students won my heart when he said “Dale, I keep thinking of your earliest days at the drive-in theater, when you had to pick up the trash off the ground each week, sometimes the sound went out, sometimes it rained so hard that you and Margi almost got blown off the roof of the snack shack as you led.”

Then he said, “I remembered that you stuck with the dream and didn’t give up.”

He discovered an important principle of ministry for all of us—never give up. Like the people listed in Hebrews, our inspiration was God. Many times I thought of Jesus’ endurance. Scripture reports, “As the time drew near for his return to heaven, he moved steadily onward towards Jerusalem with an iron will” (Luke 9:51, TLB).

You, too, can achieve the greatest of dreams. Dedicate yourself and all your aspirations to Jesus Christ. He is the inspiration and the motivation of all worthy achievements. Heb. 12:3 points us to Jesus: “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

I want to do something great for God with whatever life He has given me. I would rather attempt something great for God than to have material security, than to have the approval of people, than to fail to use what God has given me. I would rather attempt something great for God than to be bored with life. Let’s do something great for God and build a faith-driven, prevailing church.

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