

THE LIFE GIVING LEADER

LEARNING TO LEAD FROM
YOUR TRUEST SELF

TYLER REAGIN

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Forewords by Craig Groeschel and Andy Stanley

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YOUR TRUEST SELF

TYLER REAGIN
PRESIDENT OF CATALYST



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Foreword by Craig Groeschel

Years ago when I first met Tyler Reagin, two things stood out immediately. First, Tyler is crazy passionate about Jesus. Second, Tyler is obsessed with building great leaders. During our first conversation, I knew instantly we would become friends. But I had no idea we'd end up working closely together to empower leaders who love the local church.

Now, almost a decade later, I've had the privilege of serving with and learning from one of the greatest servant leaders I've ever met. In title, Tyler is president of Catalyst. But his heart and gifts extend far beyond any title or label. Tyler's love for people is contagious. I've watched him inspire thousands of people from onstage and in the next moment focus on encouraging an insecure intern. I've seen Tyler strategically solve complex problems and intentionally shape a culture over time. I've watched him win the trust of spiritually disinterested people and lead them closer to the things of God.

Because of Tyler's leadership and vision, he's gathered some of the nation's top leaders to generously invest in others at Catalyst conferences in cities around the world.

One of my mentors told me you can learn from any leader. Sometimes you learn what you *want* to do. Other times you learn what you *never* want to do. Unfortunately, most of us have been exposed to leaders we don't want to emulate.

If you have ever served under a controlling, critical, or insecure leader, you know firsthand the challenges dysfunctional leadership can create. You might have felt hesitant, afraid, demoralized, or discouraged. Unhealthy leaders create unhealthy environments. They can suck the life out of an organization.

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Thankfully, Tyler shows us a better way to lead in his new book, *The Life-Giving Leader*. Rather than demanding loyalty, a life-giving leader first extends trust. Instead of controlling followers, a life-giving leader empowers other leaders. Rather than talking down to people, a life-giving leader develops people so they can do more than they thought possible.

If you want to grow in your leadership, this is the perfect book for you. But let me warn you: there are no shortcuts. The road isn't easy. As I've heard Tyler say before, "Leadership isn't easy. It's difficult because it matters. It changes people. It's valuable. And things of value require sacrifice."

I promise you, the principles Tyler writes about are practical, powerful, and time tested. This book will push you, stretch you, and help you grow. And as you apply what you learn, you will become more like the One who gave His life that we might live.

You will become a life-giving leader.

—Craig Groeschel, senior pastor of Life.Church

Foreword by Andy Stanley

Great leaders breathe life into the leaders around them.

Insecure leaders, not so much.

You will do one or the other. There is no third option.

You *will* be included in the stories of the men and women who reported to you or worked alongside you. When they tell their stories, you'll get a mention. Either you'll be the boss, manager, or team lead who spoke to their potential, allowed them to shine, and was quick to give credit where it was due.

Or you'll be that other boss.

The one who hoarded the credit. The one so consumed by his own career that he gave little or no thought to helping the next generation. The one easily threatened by new talent, fresh ideas, and outside-the-box thinking.

Regardless of your personal success and achievements, when the folks who reported to you tell their stories, you'll be scored "pass" or "fail." While it's unlikely they'll use this exact terminology, they will remember you as either a life-giving leader or a leader who drained the life out of them. You'll be celebrated as the leader who put wind in their sails. Or you'll be remembered as a headwind—someone who impeded the progress and achievements of those you led.

The choice is yours.

The choice is yours every day.

As counterintuitive as it may sound, it is actually in your best interests to become, as my friend Tyler puts it, a life-giving leader. The value of a life is always determined by how much of it is given away. Funerals teach us that. Over the course of your marketplace or ministry career, you'll have

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endless opportunities to give your life away. What you do with those opportunities will define you. How you respond to those opportunities will determine your legacy. Live for yourself and you'll have only yourself to show for yourself in the end. But when you give your life away—when you choose to breathe life into the people around you—you'll not only add value to the lives of others, but you'll make your life more valuable as well. Tyler summarizes it perfectly:

When life flows, influence grows.

I've known, worked with, and worked for Tyler for over twelve years. He is the embodiment of this book. His personal and career successes underscore the enduring principles he teases out for his readers. If you want to have more than yourself to show for yourself, this book will help get you there.

—Andy Stanley, North Point Ministries

Introduction

A Charge

Have you ever felt as if God has given you a message to share? How about a theme your life has been focused on? If you had one chance to tell the world the thoughts that guide you, what would you say?

These interrelated questions pushed me to write this book. Among examples of poor leadership and glimmers of hope in great leadership, I feel called to steward one message. It all comes down to *life-giving leadership*.

Life-giving leadership can change the game. It can change work environments almost instantly. It can change church culture. It should be the norm.

Early in this journey, I asked my sons what they thought I should write about. I was curious to see where they think my passions lie.

My older son responded with a smirk, quickly saying, “Leadership.” He laughed and said that’s all I talk about anyway. My younger son followed up with a one-word answer: “Jesus.” I told them if I wrote a book on Jesus and leadership, then I could probably cover most of my thoughts on the life I want to lead.

The pursuit of life-giving leadership begins and ends with Jesus. My

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faith is central to my leadership, and it has directed my life for twenty-five years and will continue to do so. But why am I writing about leadership and not some other pressing need?

First, we're seeing a crisis of leadership that won't be addressed until Jesus followers step up and through their leadership bring life to others. Whether you serve as a leader on the staff of a church, work in education, lead a nonprofit organization, or head a for-profit corporation, it is essential that you see the importance of how you lead. The way you lead is mission-critical for great organizations, because as a leader, you represent something bigger than just yourself.

Jesus gives us the best picture of how leaders should lead: leadership should focus on bringing life to others. Jesus brought life to people during His time on earth, and He continues to do so today. It only makes sense that leading and life-giving go hand in hand.

Leaders, what if your greatest legacy was that people found life through your leadership? Imagine if your fingerprint was seen not only in your organization, team, and family but also in *many* organizations, teams, and families?

WELCOME TO LIFE-GIVING LEADERSHIP

One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel is known as the valley of dry bones. Have you ever felt as if your soul and even life itself had become brittle and dry, lacking fullness and abundance? I believe we all have at one time or another. That's why I'd like you to read this passage with leadership in mind. Think about work environments that felt similar to this awful valley.

The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great

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many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: *I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.* I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; *I will put breath in you, and you will come to life.* Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”
(37:1–6, NIV)

Have you ever been in a situation where someone spoke life into you and it was as though breath entered your lungs? Have you gone through seasons that were so long and dry that when something life-giving came around it was like breathing in new life? That is the type of impact life-giving leaders can have on the people around them. With the Lord’s help, we can breathe life into those we’ve been entrusted to lead.

The passage in Ezekiel continues:

I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone;

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we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’” (verses 7–14, NIV)

This prophecy of hope was given to people who were losing hope. They were as dry as bones and that’s when God breathed life. We know that God could have given life to Israel completely on His own, with no one else on hand to assist. But instead, He chose to partner with Ezekiel, asking the prophet to breathe life into the dry bones. God has always chosen to love people through His people. He uses His children. He uses His leaders.

In this book, I plan to show you that you have been called to be a life-giving leader. Just as the Lord restored hope and life to Israel, He can also partner with you to restore hope and life to those around you. Your spiritual act of worship could be to lead well.

As you partner with God to become a life-giving leader, you must learn to lead from your truest self. You can give life to others only when it’s flowing from a place of authentic leadership. That requires you to be you. If you try to lead using the approach taken by someone else, the flow of life that comes from you will be blocked.

Think of a leader whose leadership had the effect of taking life from you. I don’t mean your physical life but your inner vitality. I’m referring to the type of leader who drained your time, energy, and spiritual well-being. I don’t know anyone who would want to partner with such a leader.

Now let’s take this exercise a step further. Is it possible you could be leading in a similar way?

I invite you to join me on a journey I’ve been on for more than two

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decades. We can learn together what life-giving leadership looks like (and what it doesn't look like). And I can assure you that you will never regret exploring this path to leading as Jesus did, the way of the life-giving leader.

Let's lead as if people's lives depend on our leadership, because they do. Let's pour life into others to build a life-giving legacy of leadership. There is no greater pursuit for our leadership than to seek first the kingdom and to lead from that posture. God will serve alongside you, and it will be the most fulfilling adventure of your life. People are worth your best.

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It's Just Your Personality

You Are Uniquely Created to Lead

If you are not successful, it's probably just your personality.” I've actually been told this twice in my life. Once by a leader and another time by a friend—people I trusted. Even though the words pierced my heart, they later turned out to be a gift. But in those moments I was really hurt.

The second time was definitely painful, but it was also profound. I now know that the most important leadership moment for me was also my most difficult. It felt like failure, but God used it to change my leadership and me forever. And I hope, because of that pivotal moment, He has changed many other leaders through my leadership.

I wonder if the people who said these words even remember the situation. I still believe they were trying to be helpful, and the message they delivered *was* helpful. Just not in the way they intended.

I had two thoughts when I heard the words.

First, I thought about a couple of people who were wired as I was and who had been very successful.

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Second, and this was the game changer—if what was said about me was true, then the Lord of the universe, who created me and my unique personality, must have made a mistake. He must have misunderstood what I needed to be a great leader. He failed to hand me the tools I needed to be successful. A personality that wouldn't allow me to have a full life. The lesson I received from these two individuals was that my personality was going to set me up for floundering and not flourishing, for failure and not success.

But Psalm 139 makes me believe differently:

You formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are you works;
my soul knows it very well. (verses 13–14)

If we believe Scripture to be true, then how could we conclude that God, who made us, does not have a plan for the uniqueness He knitted into every one of us? The simple truth is that God gave each of us a distinct personality and wired every person for a specific purpose. (As we delve more deeply into life-giving leadership, we will explore this passage as the basis on which to build our leadership.)

The light came on for me in the midst of a dark time, and I have spent the past decade trying to call out this truth in the lives of leaders. When the light clicks for people and they begin to become life-giving leaders by leading from their truest selves, their leadership explodes.

Unfortunately, we have all seen leaders take too long to grasp this principle. Because of their poor leadership, they lose valuable team members. Striving to understand your uniqueness and building confidence in your calling will last a lifetime. But the time to begin is now.

HOW LEADERSHIP AND FAITH COLLIDE

I don't know anyone who walked away from his or her faith because of Jesus, but I know many who walked away because of the poor leadership of those who represent Jesus.

All of us are familiar with stories of Christian leaders who, because of self-centered decisions, have had moral failures involving finances, sex, or a multitude of other issues. And how about leaders who burn through staff members at a staggering rate, all in the pursuit of the mission? These leaders see their staff members as recruits—people who will do everything necessary to ensure their leaders achieve their desired level of recognition and honor.

What about leaders who choose to accept all the accolades for their team's hard work? When Christian leaders operate in a posture that benefits only them and not the people around them, it can inhibit and damage the faith of other people. We know the drill: our faith should be strong enough to survive the damage caused by another person's failures. That's easy to say, but it doesn't prevent bad leadership from driving people away from Jesus.

It doesn't matter whether you're a pastor or a librarian. If you are a follower of Jesus, I want you to feel the weight of this. We have probably all known someone who has walked away from faith because of another Christian's poor leadership. We must fight for our leadership to avoid this consequence.

I have dedicated myself to bringing hope to churches, organizations, nonprofits, and businesses. Christian leaders should be the best leaders in the world because we have the best Leader in history teaching us. We have the Creator infusing creativity into us. We have the Holy Spirit guiding us and giving us wisdom.

Great leadership demands that we stay in step with the Spirit. We

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need to learn the ways of life-giving leadership because it brings out the best in those around us as we lead from our truest selves. Look around. It's not hard to see the need for bringing life to others. You can do this only when you lead from your truest self, from your design. God created you for a purpose, which is to lead and to lead well.

Life-giving leaders carry the name of Jesus throughout communities and to the person standing next to them. They live out their calling with fulfillment and joy. They live to the fullest, just as Jesus implores us in John 10:10.

How we lead affects people's lives and their faith. That's a short sentence with an eternal impact. The weight of our leadership rests on our shoulders, and we need to carry it well. This is why I refer to the leadership that God calls us to as "life-giving." Here's what I mean.

Grace should flow from leaders to those around them. The most common type of leadership, however, is just the opposite. How many people have you worked for who required grace from their team members? Perhaps the leader was constantly late. Or maybe the leader lacked integrity, held unrealistic expectations, was an ineffective communicator, or was morally corrupt. We've all been there and never want to go back. Constantly having to give life and grace to those who lead you is exhausting. In contrast, wouldn't it be amazing to work for a leader who gives *you* life?

The best leader is one who continually extends grace rather than requiring it from others. The flow of grace is critical to the leader's ability to grow in influence. When leaders require grace to flow to them, the system is corrupt. It's backward. (Granted, as believers we are called to show grace and mercy to everyone, including bosses.)

Life-giving leadership flips the common scenario on its end. Life-giving leaders spread life, grace, hope, joy, and positivity like wildfire. The flow is consistent and contagious.

Rivers don't change direction because of a bad day. Unless something

blocks the river, it will always flow in the same direction. Leaders who consistently change the flow of grace will lose influence.

WHEN LIFE FLOWS, INFLUENCE GROWS

The Colorado River, which created the Grand Canyon, is one of the most magnificent and powerful bodies of water in the United States. The Colorado, however, starts as a stream that you can straddle. La Poudre Pass is the simple beginning of this river whose beauty is known worldwide. If the Colorado River were to remain the size of where it begins its course, it would hardly make an impact. However, rivers grow as other streams join the flow. What starts small, barely attracting notice, can turn into one of the most powerful forces humanity has experienced.

Life-giving leadership can do the same. When leaders steward the small amount of influence they have in a God-honoring, life-giving way, it is no surprise when they are handed more influence and more opportunities to bring hope to others. Everyone has influence over someone. Great leadership involves stewarding or managing that influence over others to the best of our ability.

The world needs more life-giving leadership. Statistics indicate that more than 65 percent of working adults would choose a new boss over a pay increase.¹ Governments and politicians have lost influence, and the level of trust we place in other people tends to be lower now than in the past. The greatest management theories of our time are based on mistrust rather than trust. The path of mistrust leads to protecting investments, not pursuing greatness.

Many people would say the workplace is not a place where life is given but instead a place where life is taken. Management steals the joy from work and from workers. Team members live on their heels, constantly insecure because their leaders are managing them poorly.

I know this sounds bleak. It is bleak. But life-giving leadership changes the game. It brings color to monotone organizations. It manifests light in dark places. It restores joy where joy has been lost. It pushes people to be their best. Who doesn't want to be known as a leader who does that?

Welcome to the lifelong pursuit of being a life-giving leader. You never arrive, but you get closer to the goal. Jack Nicklaus never stopped trying to improve his golf swing, even though he is considered the best of all time. Pablo Picasso never stopped trying to create his best masterpiece. William Shakespeare did not stop honing his craft after writing *Romeo and Juliet*.

Life-giving leaders will keep pursuing a better version of their leadership for the rest of their days. And trust me, *it's worth every minute*. If I were to ask people about the life-giving leaders they work with, I'm confident that they would say they are thankful for their leaders never quitting the race.

Writing this book was one aspect of my attempt to get better. I want to show others why life-giving leadership matters in this world that needs it so desperately. We are called to live a life worthy of the cross, to be salt and light in the world. We are commissioned to share the good news of Jesus with others, people in our offices and elsewhere. Evangelism is more than the words we say; it's the lives we live. We communicate the power of the Holy Spirit by the way He shows up in our day-to-day lives and in our leadership.

It is difficult to grasp the extent of the positive impact that life-giving leaders have on people. Better performance and a more productive work environment are a given, but the full extent of our impact comes about because we are called to live no other way.

WHAT TYPE OF LEADERS CAN BE LIFE GIVERS?

I have been asked if these principles apply only to leaders who call themselves Christian. The answer? The process of discovering your unique iden-

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tity can apply to any leader. The truth that life-giving leaders bring life to those around them is applicable to everyone.

When I was in high school, I developed a relationship with Jesus. This was not merely attending church or acting religious or pretending to go along with the faith of my family; it was a true relationship with Christ. From that day on, I have pursued Him. As a teenager, I learned that two thousand years earlier Jesus died for me and my sins, He was resurrected from the dead, and He then offered me life. It was the most life-giving act the world has seen, and the world was never the same and I will never be the same.

This is 100 percent a Christian leadership book. I can't write about life-giving leadership without putting Jesus at the center of the conversation. He's the reason I can attempt to lead others to be their best. He's the reason I look my weaknesses square in the face and strive to improve. He's the reason I see every person on my team as a life-breathed version of our heavenly Father. Life-giving leadership is always filled with hope. So is Jesus. So is the gospel.

Leadership should be a radical reflection of the life that flows from God to us and then overflows from us to those around us. In keeping with that, you'll notice that this book is divided into four parts.

In this introductory section, we'll look at the calling of leadership on the lives of those who want to lead well. Why does leadership matter? What does great leadership look like? How does life-giving leadership change the game? And how will placing the principles of Jesus at the center of our leadership change the world? You will see that this divine directive is for you.

Part 1 dives deeply into how *you* matter in your leadership. The manner in which you lead comes from who you are. This section helps you look closely at your unique personality and leadership skills. You will see that God has wired you for your calling.

Part 2 might be the most difficult for some readers, and yet it is the

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most important section of this book. We cannot be the life-giving leaders God is calling us to be without learning and leading from our truest selves. We have to learn how to release the life givers within us. Have you ever met a great leader who was acting like someone they are not? This section will help you avoid the pitfalls of chasing other people's uniqueness and, instead, lead from your own strengths.

Part 3 shows practical ways that life-giving leaders lead daily. You will see why I believe the four S's of leadership can serve as the basis for a lifetime of God-honoring leadership.

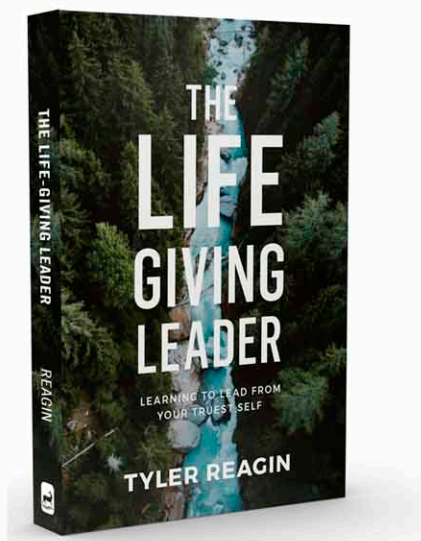
Finally, in part 4, you will learn how life-giving leaders change, and have an impact on, the businesses, churches, schools, and nonprofits they work for.

I pray that grace and life will flow from me to you and from God to you. I pray that you will see how life can flow from you and from your leadership.

When life flows, your influence grows. It's as simple as that, and yet it's never easy.

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