

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

Review by Dr. Greg Wiens

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, heritage, opportunities and of course, hard work. He builds his case compellingly, citing example after example of people who not only worked hard and were talented, but lucky too.

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

For example, most professional Canadian hockey players were born in the first quarter of the year. As young children, they were selected because they were older, bigger and more coordinated than their teammates. They were then placed into a league that allowed them to develop more fully than those not drafted into this all-star league. 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 successful 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 available to others, Gates had already developed his 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

A CHRISTIAN LENS

The implications of this book for the Christian leader are significant. They too must be focused on hard work, cultural legacy, heritage, gifts, skills and opportunities. However, they can sift the message in *Outliers* through the screen of God's providence. Christian leaders must develop a sense clarity of mind to also seize opportunities when they come along, but there is much more.

The Christian community commonly adulates its leaders who lead large organizations or author popular books. They are too easily seen as "outliers", more gifted than other believers. Christians must also realize that there is much more operating here than hard work and talent. There are opportunities that came to these "successful" leaders that other "not so successful" leaders never had a chance to capitalize upon. There are also factors beyond human control, such as cultural legacy or family heritage. To the Christian, these factors are not random as Gladwell states, but totally within God's purvey.

Whether you consider yourself successful or not, *Outliers* will help you understand the circumstances and factors that have led you to this point in your life. The question is not whether others are more successful. The question is rather, have you worked hard and been faithful with the opportunities that God has allowed to come your way. This is the parable of the talents.

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