The Next Generation of Generals

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Raising Sons and Daughters Who Will Carry the Flame

SOLOMON KPOU





The Next Generation of Generals: Raising Sons and Daughters Who Will Carry the Flame

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To the next generation in my own home: Georgina, Christina, Giftens, Bruce, David and Eliana. You are my joy and my daily reminder of why this book matters. May you carry the flame further and brighter than your father ever could.

And to every young man and young woman God is quietly raising up in this hour: you were not born too late or too early. You were born for this. Arise and shine.

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To the many children and young people I have had the privilege of serving over nine years of working with those with complex needs: you have taught me

more than I ever taught you. I carry your faces in my heart, and this book carries something of what you gave me.

And to you, the reader: thank you for picking up this book. Whether you are a young person sensing the call of God, a parent praying over a child, a pastor or a mentor pouring into others, I pray that God will meet you here and send you out stronger.

To My Mentors and Fellow Labourers in Ministry

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To all of you, I say thank you.

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As I reflect on my journey, I recognise that no one becomes who they are entirely on their own. God places people along our paths to teach us, correct us, challenge us, encourage us and prepare us for the assignments ahead.

The Scripture reminds us:

> "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV)

I thank God for allowing our paths to cross. The seeds of wisdom, encouragement and leadership you have planted in my life continue to bear fruit.

May the Almighty God richly bless you, strengthen your families, enlarge your ministries and reward your labour of love in His Kingdom.

With heartfelt appreciation, honour and gratitude,

Solomon Kpou

Author | Pastor | Founder, Life Reclaimed Publishing

Preface

Some time ago I wrote *Generals in the Pew*, a book about the hidden leaders sitting in our churches every Sunday. These are ordinary believers with extraordinary callings who simply need to be discovered, equipped and released.

But one question kept coming back to me after that book was finished. What about those who are not yet in the pew? What about the boys and girls in our children's ministries? What about the teenagers on the edge of our youth groups, and the young adults deciding right now whether faith is worth their whole lives? Who is preparing them?

This book is my answer to that question. It is the companion to the first. If *Generals in the Pew* was about releasing the leaders already among us, *The Next Generation of Generals* is about raising the ones coming after us. It is also about urging young people themselves to rise.

The message has grown out of many years of pastoral ministry, and out of nine years of working with children and young people with complex needs, many of them affected by trauma, family breakdown and disadvantage. Those young people taught me more than I ever taught them. They taught me that potential is often buried under pain, that a single steady adult can change the direction of a life, and that God is never finished with anyone. I carry their faces in my heart, and something of what they gave me is in these pages. Out of respect for them, I have not told their stories here. Their dignity matters more than my illustrations.

It has also grown out of my own home. My wife and I are raising six children, and I have learned, often slowly, that the generals of tomorrow are formed less by the sermons we preach than by the lives we live in front of them at the dinner table.

A word about how this book handles Scripture and sources. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. I have tried to explain each passage in its own setting before applying it to ours, and to make clear where I am interpreting rather than simply reporting what the text says. Where I imagine a biblical scene in more detail than the Bible gives, I say so. Where I draw on history or research, the source is named so you can check it for yourself.

A word, too, about the title. The language of generals and armies can be misused, and I am painfully aware of the harm done when leaders confuse authority with control. Throughout this book, a general means one thing: a servant under Christ, the only true Commander, who has been trusted to carry others because he or she has first learned to kneel.

Whether you are a young person sensing the call of God, a parent praying over a child, or a pastor or mentor pouring into others, I pray that God will meet you here and send you out stronger.

Solomon Kpou
Perth, Western Australia

INTRODUCTION

The Generation That Did Not Know

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10

A Verse That Will Not Let Me Rest

The scene that opens this book is imagined. Scripture does not name these people or tell us their story. It gives us the pattern they represent.

The old man sits in the shade at the end of the day, in the hill country of Ephraim, where the terraces step down towards the valley. His hands are spotted now, and his eyes are not what they were. But his memory is clear.

He was a boy when the priests stepped into the Jordan in flood season and the water stopped. He remembers the strange silence of a riverbed, the smell of wet mud, and twelve men coming up out of it with stones on their shoulders. He remembers the shout at Jericho, and the ground shaking under his feet. He was there at Shechem, years later, when an old Joshua stood before the tribes and said, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." He remembers saying, with everyone else, that they would serve Him too.

Now his grandson comes up the path. The boy is cheerful, sunburnt, carrying a small clay figure he bought from a trader near the high place in the next village. A good-luck charm, he says. For the harvest. The old man asks him whether he knows what happened at the Jordan. The boy shrugs. He has heard there are some stones down at Gilgal. He has never been told why.

That scene is imagined. The pattern is not.

Few verses in the Bible have unsettled me as deeply as Judges 2:10.

To feel its weight, you have to read it where it sits. The opening chapters of Judges deliberately look back. Judges 2:6–9 repeats, almost word for word, the closing scene of the book of Joshua (Joshua 24:28–31). The writer is drawing a line under one era before opening the next. And the line he draws is this:

> So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel. (Judges 2:7)

Then Joshua dies at one hundred and ten. The elders who stood beside him die too. And in the space of a single verse, everything changes.

Notice the contrast the writer sets up. The first generation is described as those "who had seen". The next generation is described as those who "did not know". The parallel verse in Joshua makes the point even sharper, because there the elders are those "who had known all the works of the LORD" (Joshua 24:31). One generation had known. The next did not. In Hebrew thought, to know the LORD was never simply to hold information about Him. The word carries the sense of knowing by experience and relationship. It is possible that this new generation had heard fragments of the old stories. Perhaps they could point to the stones at Gilgal. But the LORD Himself was not known to them, and the works He had done no longer shaped their lives.

The verses that follow show what filled the empty space. "Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Judges 2:11–12). Within a generation, the people who had been carried across the Jordan were bowing to the gods of their neighbours.

We need to read this carefully, and hold two truths together.

The first is that the text holds the new generation responsible. They did evil. They forsook the LORD. They followed other gods. Scripture never treats them as helpless victims of their upbringing, and neither should we treat any young person that way. Every generation must answer to God for itself.

The second is that God had never intended the knowledge of Him to depend on each generation discovering it alone. He had told Israel to talk about

His words at home, "when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). He had even set up the stones at Gilgal as a kind of invitation to questions: "that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'" (Joshua 4:6).

Scripture does not tell us exactly where the handover broke down. That is a question the text leaves open, and I do not want to claim more than it says. But it is hard to read Judges 2 without asking what was not passed on. The miracles were real. The faith of Joshua's generation was genuine. And yet, somewhere between the grandfather and the grandson, the story stopped being told, or stopped being believed, or stopped being lived in a way the young could see.

That is why this verse will not let me rest. Faith is never more than one generation from being forgotten. Not because God fails, but because people do.

I wrote this book because I do not want Judges 2:10 to describe our generation, or the one coming after us. I want it to be said of our sons and daughters that they knew the LORD, and knew the work He had done, because someone took the time to show them. And I want to see young men and women rise who will not only receive that faith, but carry it to people we will never meet.

The rest of this book is about how that happens. It begins with a cry.

The Cry for Generals

There is a cry rising across the earth. If you listen, you can hear it.

You can hear it in the quiet desperation of a teenager scrolling late into the night, looking for something worth living for. You can hear it in the prayers of parents watching their children drift from the faith they were raised in. You can hear it in churches where the same faithful few have carried the load for decades. They are growing tired now, and they are wondering who will take their place. You can hear it in schools, in communities and in nations that have lost their moral compass and are searching for someone to point the way.

It is a cry for leaders. Not louder voices. Not more famous faces. It is a cry for men and women of God who carry His heart, know His Word and are willing to lead others into His purposes.

It is a cry for generals.

Jesus heard that cry long before we did. Matthew tells us that when He saw the multitudes, "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Then He turned to His disciples:

> "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37–38)

The problem was never the size of the harvest. The problem was the shortage of workers, and especially of those who would lead others into the field. And notice what Jesus did next. In the very next verses He called twelve ordinary men to Himself, gave them authority and sent them out (Matthew 10:1–5). The answer to the prayer for labourers began with the people who prayed it.

Look honestly at the world young people are growing up in, and you will see why the cry is so urgent. Here in Australia, the 2021 Census recorded that 38.9 per cent of Australians reported no religion, up from 30.1 per cent only five years earlier. Among people aged 15 to 24, the figure was 45.6 per cent, and among those aged 25 to 34 it was 48.4 per cent, almost half (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Those numbers do not tell us what is happening in any one young person's heart. Statistics never do. But they do tell us that a great many young Australians are growing up without any living connection to the faith of their grandparents.

The pressures they face are real. Constant comparison online. Confusion about identity and purpose. Anxiety about the future. Loneliness in the middle of a crowd. A culture that often treats Christian faith as outdated, or even harmful. Many young people grow up in homes where faith is absent, or where it was once present and has quietly faded.

At the same time, many of our churches are ageing. Faithful leaders who have served for thirty or forty years are looking around and asking, "Who will carry the work forward?" Too often the answer is unclear. We have not always been intentional about raising the next generation. We have entertained young people. We have protected them. Sometimes we have overlooked them. But we have not always trained them, trusted them and released them.

I am not writing from fear, though. I am writing from hope. In my years of ministry, and in nine years of working with children and young people with complex needs, I have seen again and again that potential is often hidden beneath the surface. Young people the world had written off showed courage and strength that surprised everyone, once they were given love, patience and someone who believed in them. I learned not to judge a young person by where they are today, but by what God might make of them tomorrow.

That is how God sees. When He looked at a shepherd boy in the fields, He saw a king. When He found a frightened Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from the enemy, the Angel of the LORD greeted him as a "mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:11–12). Others see only followers. God sees generals.

The whole of Scripture tells the same story. God has always entrusted great things to the young. Joseph received his dreams as a teenager (Genesis 37:2–11). Samuel heard God's voice as a boy (1 Samuel 3:1–10). David faced Goliath while he was still a youth (1 Samuel 17:33, 42). Josiah became king at eight and began to seek God at sixteen (2 Chronicles 34:1–3). Esther was a young woman when she risked her life for her people. Mary was very likely young when she said yes to bearing the Son of God, though Scripture does not tell us her age. Paul told Timothy not to let anyone despise his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). The apostle John wrote to the young men of the church because they were strong, the Word of God abided in them, and they had overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14).

God is not waiting for this generation to grow old before He uses them. He is calling them now. And He is calling the rest of us to help them answer.

Four Generations in One Verse

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he was very likely near the end of his life. He was in chains. Many had turned away from him. He knew that the time of his departure had come (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:6). He could have filled that letter with complaints or regrets. Instead, he filled it with a charge.

> And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Read that verse slowly and you will find four generations in it. There is Paul, who taught. There is Timothy, who heard. There are the faithful people Timothy would teach. And there are the "others also" whom they in turn would reach. Paul was not only thinking about his own ministry, or even about Timothy's. He was thinking about people he would never meet. He was thinking generationally.

That is the heartbeat of this book.

It is worth noticing what Paul asked Timothy to look for. He did not say "commit these to gifted men" or "to popular men". He said faithful. The Greek word translated "men" here is a general term for human beings, which is why a number of modern translations render it "faithful people". The charge is for sons and daughters alike. What matters is not status, gender or charisma. What matters is whether a person can be trusted to hold what they have been given and pass it on intact.

Notice also that Paul placed this charge right beside a call to hardship. The very next verse says, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). Passing on the faith is not a programme we run once a year. It is a battle we stay in for life. It costs time, patience and love. It means opening your life to people who will see your weaknesses up close. It means trusting others with responsibility before they are perfect, and staying with them when they fail.

Judges 2:10 shows us what happens when the chain breaks. 2 Timothy 2:2 shows us how the chain holds. Between those two verses lies the whole message of this book.

Think about your own place in that chain for a moment. Someone, somewhere, passed the faith to you. Perhaps it was a parent or grandparent. Perhaps it was a Sunday school teacher, a youth leader, a friend at school or a stranger who handed you a Bible. Behind them stood someone else, and behind that person stood others, all the way back to a handful of disciples on a hillside in

Galilee. You are not the first link in this chain. By God's grace, you will not be the last.

The question this book will keep asking is simple. Who is next?

What I Mean, and Do Not Mean, by "General"

The word "general" can easily be misunderstood, so I want to be clear about it from the beginning.

A general in God's kingdom is not a boss, a celebrity or a spiritual strongman. He or she does not rule over others, demand loyalty or use people to build a personal platform. I have written elsewhere about the damage done when shepherds abuse the flock. Hear me on this: nothing in this book should ever be used to excuse that kind of leadership. Jesus said plainly that the rulers of this world lord it over people, "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant" (Mark 10:43).

When Joshua stood near Jericho, he met a Man with a drawn sword who described Himself as the Commander of the army of the LORD. Joshua did not salute Him as an equal. He fell on his face and asked what his Lord wanted to say to his servant (Joshua 5:13–15). That is the posture of every true general. There is only one Commander, and His name is Jesus. We serve under Him.

So when I speak of generals, I mean servant-leaders under Christ. I mean men and women who have been formed in obscurity, tested in faithfulness and trusted with influence. They carry responsibility for others because they love them. Yes, they fight, but their battle is never against flesh and blood. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Our enemies are not people. Our weapons are prayer, truth, righteousness, faith and the Word of God. And the victory has already been won at the cross.

I also honour soldiers. Every believer is called to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The faithful believer who prays, serves, gives and turns up week after week is precious to God and vital to the church. Without them, nothing gets done. But many churches have plenty of willing soldiers and too few leaders who will train them, guide them and send them out. We have crowds, but not

enough shepherds. We have activity, but not always direction. A church full of sincere believers with no one to disciple and release them will often stall, not because the people lack love for God, but because no one has helped them find their place.

That is why the world does not only need more soldiers. It needs generals: people who will not only fight the good fight themselves, but will raise up others to fight it too.

And when I speak of generals, I mean daughters as well as sons. God has always raised up both. Deborah arose as a mother in Israel (Judges 5:7). Esther stood before a king for such a time as this. Hannah's prayers shaped a nation's future. Huldah the prophetess explained the Word of God to a king. Lois and Eunice planted faith in a young Timothy. If you are a daughter of God reading these pages, hear me clearly: the call is for you too.

A spiritual general, then, is not someone who has climbed above others. A spiritual general is someone who has gone lower. Lower in humility. Deeper in prayer. Further in faithfulness. And because of that, God trusts them to carry others.

How to Read This Book

This book has two audiences, and I will speak to both throughout.

If you are young, this book is a summons. You may feel ordinary, unqualified or overlooked. You may carry wounds from your past or doubts about your future. But God has not overlooked you. He is calling you to rise, to be formed, to be faithful and to lead. You are not only the church of tomorrow. You are part of the church today.

If you are a parent, grandparent, pastor, youth leader, teacher or mentor, this book is a charge. Look around you. The next generation of generals is already in your home, your church and your community. They need you to see them. They need you to pray for them, believe in them and pour into them what God has poured into you. Like Paul with Timothy, you are called to commit what you have received to faithful people who will teach others also.

The book is arranged in four parts, and they build on one another.

Part One, *The Cry and the Call*, asks what a general is and why the flame of faith so often fails to pass from one generation to the next.

Part Two, *How God Makes a General*, follows three young leaders in Scripture, Joshua, Elisha and Timothy, and then the training grounds God uses to form His people: the wilderness, brokenness, hidden faithfulness and prayer.

Part Three, *The Character of a General*, looks at the qualities that make a leader trustworthy: integrity, humility and consecration; courage in the battle; and the love that kneels to serve.

Part Four, *The Mission of a General*, turns outward: to faith and vision, to spiritual fathering and mothering, to building and sending others, and finally to finishing well.

Each chapter closes with questions for reflection and a prayer. Please do not rush past them. You can use them on your own, but they work especially well in a small group, a youth ministry, a family devotion or a mentoring relationship. At the end of the book you will find a small-group guide and appendices with Scripture confessions, prayers for the next generation, a self-assessment, a mentoring guide and suggestions for further reading.

Wherever I draw on history or research, I have tried to give you the source so that you can check it yourself. Wherever I imagine a biblical scene in more detail than Scripture gives, I will tell you so. The Bible does not need our embellishment, and young people in particular deserve to know the difference between what God has said and what a preacher has added.

Maybe you are young and sense a stirring you cannot explain. Maybe you are older and long to see the flame passed on. Either way, this book is for you. My prayer is simple: that the generation rising now will know the LORD and the work He has done, and will carry it further than we ever dreamed.

The cry for generals is rising. Heaven has heard it.

The question is, who will answer?

PART ONE

The Cry and the Call

CHAPTER 1

What Is a General?

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 2:3

The word *general* brings all kinds of pictures to mind. For some it means medals and polished boots, a stern face on a parade ground and a voice that expects to be obeyed. For others it calls up darker pictures of power used without mercy. If that is what you see when you hear the word, I understand why you hesitate. The church has seen enough leaders who confused leadership with control.

So let me be clear from the start. In God's kingdom a general is not a dictator in the pulpit or a personality on a stage. A general is a servant who has been trusted with responsibility. A general is a soldier who has learned to follow so well that God can now use them to lead others.

That is the kind of general this generation needs. And that is the kind of general God is still making today, out of ordinary young men and young women who say yes to Him.

Barefoot Before the Commander

Every army has a chain of command, and the army of God is no different. The difference is who sits at the top. In the kingdom of God there is only one Commander, and it is not us.

The scene is near Jericho, and it is one of the strangest moments in the Old Testament. Israel has crossed the Jordan. The men have been circumcised at Gilgal. The Passover has been kept, and the manna has stopped (Joshua 5:2–12). The walled city that had terrified the spies forty years earlier now stands in front of them. Joshua, the man responsible for what happens next, goes out alone, perhaps to look at the walls and think.

He looks up, and a Man is standing in front of him with His sword drawn. Joshua does what any commander would do. He walks up and asks, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" (Joshua 5:13).

The answer must have startled him. "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (Joshua 5:14).

No. The Commander did not come to take Israel's side. He came to take charge. Joshua had asked the wrong question. The issue was not whether God was on Joshua's side, but whether Joshua was on God's.

Joshua understood immediately. He fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and asked, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" The reply was not a battle plan, at least not yet. It was this: "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy" (Joshua 5:14–15).

Many Christian interpreters through the centuries have seen in this Commander a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. The text itself does not say so directly, and we should hold that reading with care. But at the very least, Joshua met One whose authority was so far above his own that worship was the only right response, and whose presence made the ground holy.

That is where every true general begins. Barefoot, face down, asking for orders. Joshua was already the leader of Israel, but he understood that he was not the one in charge. He was a man under authority.

The Gospels give us another soldier who understood this. A Roman centurion in Capernaum, an officer whose very title came from the Latin word for a hundred, came to Jesus on behalf of a servant who was paralysed and suffering. When Jesus offered to come to his house, the centurion said something remarkable:

> "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under au-

> thority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (Matthew 8:8–9)

Jesus marvelled at his faith (Matthew 8:10). The centurion understood that authority flows from being under authority. His orders carried weight not because of his personality, but because Rome stood behind them. In the same way, he saw that the words of Jesus carried the full weight of God.

This is the heart of spiritual authority. It is never something we own. It is something we carry on behalf of Another. The one who will not be under authority has no right to be in authority.

"It Shall Not Be So Among You"

Jesus made the same point to His own disciples when they argued about who would be the greatest. James and John had just asked to sit at His right and left hand in glory, and the other ten were furious (Mark 10:35–41). Jesus called them together:

> "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant." (Mark 10:42–43)

It shall not be so among you. Those words should be written over the door of every church office, every youth group and every leadership meeting. The world's way of leadership climbs up and pushes others down. The kingdom way kneels down and lifts others up. Jesus went on to say that even He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Notice that Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for wanting to be great. He redefined greatness. Ambition is not the enemy. Ambition pointed at self is the enemy. A young person who longs to make a difference for God should not be told to stop longing. They should be shown that the road to greatness in God's kingdom runs through a towel and a basin.

Peter, who had once argued for the top position himself, learned this lesson the hard way. Years later he wrote to the elders of the churches and urged them to shepherd the flock willingly and eagerly, "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). He reminded them that there is a Chief Shepherd who will one day appear (1 Peter 5:4). Every leader will give an account to Him.

Leadership is often summed up in one word: influence. John Maxwell, among others, has done much to popularise that definition. So when I speak of spiritual leadership, I mean this: the God-given ability and responsibility to influence others towards Christ, exercised in humble submission to Christ, for the good of the people being led.

Each part of that definition matters. *Towards Christ*, because a leader who draws people to themselves has missed the point. *In submission to Christ*, because a leader who answers to no one is dangerous. *For the good of the people*, because the moment leaders begin to use people for their own ends, they have stopped leading in the way of Jesus and started lording it over others in the way of the world.

I have sat with people who were deeply hurt by leaders who used the language of authority to control, silence or exploit them. If you are one of them, I want you to know that what was done to you was not the leadership this book describes. It was the very thing Jesus said must not be so among us. Authority in the kingdom is not a throne. It is a towel and a basin.

Follower, Soldier, General

It may help to think of three stages of growth. These are not three classes of Christians, as though some were worth more to God than others. Every believer is equally loved and equally saved by grace. But these stages describe a path of maturity that God invites each of us to walk.

A follower is someone who has heard the call of Jesus and responded. Jesus' first words to Peter and Andrew were, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). This is where everyone begins, and there is no shame in it. In fact, nobody ever outgrows being a follower of Jesus. The greatest general is still, first and always, a disciple at His feet.

In the early stages, though, a follower is mostly receiving. They come to be fed, encouraged and helped. Their faith is growing, but it still leans on others. Think of the crowds who followed Jesus for the bread and the miracles. When His teaching became costly, John records that "many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Do you also want to go away?" Peter's answer marks the moment a follower begins to become something more: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:66–68).

A soldier is someone who has moved from receiving to serving. They have counted the cost and committed themselves. They endure hardship. They turn up when it is inconvenient. They know there is a battle, and they have taken their place in it. Paul describes the soldier as one who does not get tangled up in the affairs of this life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him (2 Timothy 2:4). Soldiers are faithful, loyal and willing.

A general is someone who carries responsibility not only for their own faithfulness but for the growth of others. A general still fights, still serves and still follows, but has also learned to see the bigger picture. A general asks, "Who am I raising up? Who will carry this when I am gone?" A general understands the mission, discerns the times and helps others find their place in God's purposes.

You can watch all three stages in the life of Joshua. As a young man he served as Moses' assistant, staying in the tent of meeting when others had gone home (Exodus 33:11). He fought as a soldier, leading Israel's fighting men against Amalek (Exodus 17:9–10). And over some forty years he grew into the man God would trust to lead a nation across the Jordan. Follower, soldier, general. One life, growing through all three.

You can watch it in Timothy too. He was raised in the faith by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). He joined Paul as a young helper, travelling, learning and serving. In time Paul sent him to strengthen churches and guard sound teaching, and in the end charged him to raise up others. The young helper became a man who carried the care of churches.

Here is the key. The difference between these stages is not mainly talent, personality or position. It is formation. Generals are not born in the spotlight. They are formed in secret places, through years of faithfulness, testing and

growth. Many of the people who will one day lead the church are sitting right now in a youth group, a classroom or a lounge room, with no idea of what God has placed in them.

Four Marks of a General

What sets a general apart? It is not a title. Many people carry titles who have never led anyone anywhere. Nor is it volume, personality or popularity. When I look in Scripture, I see four marks that God looks for in those He raises up to lead: character, courage, conviction and commission.

The first mark is character. As the familiar saying goes, character is who you are when no one is watching. It is the inner life that holds steady when the pressure outside rises. Paul's lists of qualities for church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 say very little about talent and a great deal about character: self-control, faithfulness, gentleness, hospitality, a good reputation and a well-ordered home. Apart from being "able to teach", almost everything on those lists describes the shape of a life rather than a skill. God can give gifts in a moment, but character is grown over years. A gifted leader without character is like a tall building on a cracked foundation. The higher it goes, the more dangerous it becomes.

The second mark is courage. A general must be willing to move forward when others hold back. Courage is not the absence of fear. For the believer, it is obedience in the presence of fear. Again and again God told His leaders, "Be strong and of good courage" (Joshua 1:6). He would not have needed to say it if they had never felt afraid. Our courage does not come from confidence in ourselves. It comes from the presence of God with us: "for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

The third mark is conviction. A general knows what they believe and why. In a time when truth is treated as a matter of personal taste, young believers need roots that go deep into the Word of God. Conviction keeps a leader from being blown about by every new opinion. It is what allowed Daniel, as a young man far from home in a foreign palace, to purpose in his heart that he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8). Daniel did not make that decision in the mo-

ment the king's food arrived. He had made it long before, somewhere in his heart.

The fourth mark is commission. A general does not appoint themselves. They are sent. Every true leader in Scripture had a moment, or a season, when God called them and gave them a task. When God called Jeremiah, the young prophet protested that he could not speak because he was only a youth. God's answer was direct: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak" (Jeremiah 1:7). Leadership is not something we grab. It is something we receive. And because we receive it from God, we can only carry it out by depending on God.

These four marks belong together. Character without courage becomes private goodness that never confronts anything. Courage without character becomes recklessness. Conviction without commission becomes a person with strong opinions and no assignment. And commission without the other three is a calling that will collapse under its first real test. God grows all four, usually slowly, and usually in places no one else can see.

Sons and Daughters

Notice that none of these marks belong only to men.

When Barak hesitated to lead Israel's army against Sisera, it was Deborah, a prophetess who was judging Israel at that time, who called him out and went with him into battle (Judges 4:4–9). Esther, a young woman in a foreign court, risked her life for her people with the words, "If I perish, I perish!" (Esther 4:16). The God who raised up generals among the sons of Israel also raised them up among the daughters.

This was not an exception to God's plan. It was part of the promise. Through the prophet Joel, God said that a day would come when He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up in Jerusalem and declared that this was that day (Acts 2:16–18). From then on, the New Testament is full of women serving in the mission of God. Philip the evangelist "had four virgin daughters who prophesied" (Acts 21:9). In Romans 16, Paul greets a long list of co-workers, and many of them are women: Phoebe, a servant of the

church in Cenchrea; Priscilla, who risked her life for Paul; Mary, who laboured much; and others (Romans 16:1–7, 12).

Christians hold different convictions about the particular roles of men and women in church leadership, and I do not intend to settle that debate in these pages. But on this point Scripture is clear and the whole church can agree: God calls, gifts and uses His daughters. The next generation of generals will include young women of prayer, courage, wisdom and conviction. If you are one of them, do not wait for permission to be faithful. Be faithful where you are, and let God open the doors.

This book is for both.

Made in the Trenches, Not on the Parade Ground

On parade day everyone looks like a soldier. The uniforms are pressed, the boots shine and the band plays. But no war has ever been won on a parade ground. Battles are won by soldiers who have been tested in mud, cold, fatigue and danger.

It is the same in the kingdom. Platforms do not make generals. Hardship does. That is why Paul wrote to young Timothy, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). And he went on:

> No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Timothy 2:4)

We need to be careful with this picture. Paul is not glorifying violence or calling Christians to fight people. Elsewhere he makes it plain that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12). Our enemy is spiritual. Our weapons are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer (Ephesians 6:13–18). The military picture is a metaphor. Its point is endurance, focus and loyalty to the One who enlisted us.

Church history gives us an example of what happens when military language is pointed in the right direction. In June 1865, a Methodist preacher named William Booth began preaching to the crowds outside a pub in London's East End. His work was first called the Christian Mission. In 1878, reading a line in its annual report that described the mission as "a Volunteer Army",

Booth changed the wording, and the Christian Mission became The Salvation Army (The Salvation Army International, "History"). Its officers and soldiers took the language of warfare and turned it towards the poor, the hungry and the forgotten. His wife Catherine, who had written a pamphlet in 1859 defending women's right to preach the gospel, was as much a founder of the movement as he was. Within two years the Army had reached Adelaide, where its first meetings in Australia were accompanied by food for the hungry. Whatever one thinks of every detail of their methods, the Booths understood that an army in God's kingdom exists to rescue people, not to rule them.

Think also about how God trained the leaders of the Bible. Moses spent forty years looking after sheep in the desert before he led Israel out of Egypt (Acts 7:29–30). David learned to fight lions and bears in the fields long before anyone knew his name (1 Samuel 17:34–37). Joseph was formed in a pit and a prison before he ever stood in a palace. Even Jesus lived around thirty years in relative obscurity before His public ministry began (Luke 3:23).

The trenches are where God builds what the parade will later reveal. They are the long, unseen seasons of serving, waiting, praying and obeying. They include disappointments, misunderstandings, small tasks and hard lessons. Many young people want the platform without the trench. But a general who skips the trench will not survive the battle.

Here is the good news. Maybe you are in a hard season right now. You feel overlooked and tested. You are waiting and wondering whether God has forgotten you. You may be exactly where generals are made. Hardship is not proof that God has rejected you. Often it is proof that He is preparing you.

And if you are raising young people, you have a sacred part to play in this. Our culture tends to do one of two things with the next generation. Either it protects them from every difficulty, or it leaves them alone to face difficulty with no support. Neither produces generals. In my experience, struggle does not damage young people nearly as often as isolation does. What makes the difference is someone who believes in them, walks with them through hard things and does not give up on them. Our task is not to remove every trench. Our task is to stand in it with them.

So let your sons and daughters carry real responsibility. Let them serve where no one claps. Let them fail safely and learn to get back up. Speak about

the call of God over their lives, not only about their careers. And model the kind of servant leadership you hope they will one day show. Whether it is a church in Perth, a school in Sydney or a family anywhere in the world, the next generation will lead the way they have seen leadership lived.

The generals of tomorrow are not somewhere off in the future. They are sitting in our youth groups, in our Sunday school rooms and around our dinner tables today.

For Reflection

1. What picture comes to mind when you hear the word *general*? How does the servant-leadership of Jesus in Mark 10:42–45 change that picture?
2. Joshua asked the Commander, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" and was told, "No." In what areas of your life are you asking God to take your side, rather than asking whether you are on His?
3. Of the three stages, follower, soldier and general, which best describes where you are right now? What would the next step of growth look like?
4. Think about the four marks: character, courage, conviction and commission. Which is strongest in your life? Which needs the most growth?
5. Who is one young person you could encourage, serve or walk alongside this month?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Commander of the army of the Lord and the Chief Shepherd of Your people. I take off my sandals before You. Teach me that true authority comes from being under Your authority. Build character in me where no one sees. Give me courage to obey when I am afraid. Root me in the convictions of Your Word, and send me where You choose. Make me a servant first. And raise up a generation of sons and daughters who will carry Your flame with humility and strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.