

EXCERPT



The Crucibles That Shape Us *Navigating the Defining Challenges of Leadership*

May 7, 2024 | \$22, 128 pages, casebound | 978-1-5140-0806-5

Life's biggest setbacks and disasters can actually be essential passageways in our relationship with God and opportunities to grow in leadership. In this illuminating guidebook, Gayle D. Beebe identifies seven crucibles—powerful catalysts for transformation—that, when embraced, shape us on our journey and become a bedrock for a better, richer faith.

A Call to Adapt and Change

Crucibles have the power to shape us by refining our character, calling forth our best effort, and teaching us to rely on God. Rarely if ever anticipated, crucibles test our capacity to adapt and change. In turn, they also invite us to find new solutions to vexing problems to secure successful and sustaining outcomes both personally and professionally.

What defines a *crucible* is a modification and combination of the three aspects of the word that Merriam-Webster outlines: (1) a high degree of heat or energy that (2) creates a severe or significant test and (3) uses a place, situation, or experience to catalyze growth, refinement, and change. Working from this definition and reflecting on experiences that have shaped me, I explore seven defining crucibles that confront and challenge virtually every leader at some point. We'll cover each one in a chapter of this book.

The crucible of missed meaning. This crucible involves the suffering we experience when our incomplete understanding causes us to miss the meaning in a situation and respond from mistaken perception. Failing to develop self-understanding and self-regulation—two essential ingredients to success in life and leadership—can limit our comprehension and knowledge.

The crucible of enduring challenge. This experience focuses on perseverance and the honest admission that success stems mostly from a firm resolve to keep going rather than give up, despite how much we may know. We conquer persistent challenges by outlasting the obstacles and the opposition and believing fully in our mission and purpose.

The crucible of human treachery. These situations relate primarily to a spiritual and intellectual struggle: How do we handle betrayal? Cultivating deeper self-awareness, a willingness to self-correct, and clarity of purpose help us combat sabotage and betrayal.

The crucible of awakened moral conscience. This crucible recognizes the need for leaders to develop character and integrity. We experience a moral awakening personally when we confront our failure to live up to our deeply held convictions and determine to do better. In 2020, our nation faced a reassessment of how well we honor the promises of our founding ideals and how we can build a more just and equitable society. Or, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., how do we pursue the long "arc of the moral universe . . . [that] bends toward justice"?

The crucible of social conflict. This confronts us today. Born of long-simmering social tensions throughout our country, these festering divisions arise from unfulfilled promises activated by social unrest. Recognizing nonviolent, civil disobedience as a biblical imperative has given Christians the spiritual strength to endure hardship and setback, while pursuing the greater good of a free and equitable society. We still have a long way to go, but we cling to hope, which drives all constructive and enduring social change.

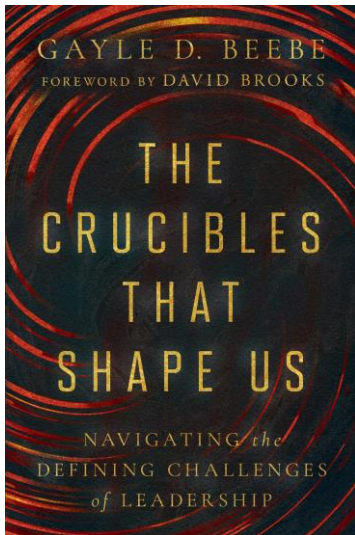


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“Gayle asks us to see in the deepest sense. Not only to ask: What events are unfolding, and what events are likely to unfold? But more crucially: Do I see what’s happening to me? Do I see what’s happening because of me? In these crucible moments, because of some tragedy or some betrayal, the normal patterns of life do not pertain. Everything is confusing, in turmoil. The old models don’t apply. One has to learn to re-see. I hope as you read this book, you will grow in your capacity to open your eyes and see.”

—David Brooks, from the foreword

The crucible of human suffering. The sixth crucible occurs when we’re powerless in the face of natural disaster, disease, or human evil. Navigating such suffering requires a larger context of meaning and purpose, and a caring community. As our community at Westmont experienced dangerous disasters, mourned deaths, and welcomed displaced students fleeing human evil, the grace and faithfulness of God and the love and support of our extended community helped us endure.

The crucible of personal choice. Here we explore what happens when we make decisions and choices that end up going terribly wrong, and we must confront the reality that our own moral choices make real and enduring impacts.

Throughout the book, I demonstrate how these seven crucibles relate to biblical principles that can inform and guide us. I also describe spiritual practices that not only sustain and guide us but invite God to shape us into the person and leader he wants us to be. And I focus attention on the power and role of seeking meaning throughout every crucible experience. Each chapter ends with a reflection section. Taking the time to journal through the questions or discuss them with a mentor or group will deepen your understanding of how these crucibles are at play in your own life.

Encouragement to Endure

If we want to invest our energy in purposes that outlive us, we must learn how to let God shape us in the midst of our crucibles. We choose whether we collapse under the weight of our struggles and calamities or rise to the challenges before us with God’s help. Crucibles bring suffering but they also offer transformative opportunities that shape our character and help us become the best version of ourselves. As we respond, we can fulfill God’s greatest purposes for our life.

—taken from the introduction: Lesson in Endurance



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Q & A



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Gayle D. Beebe (MBA and PhD, Claremont Graduate University) is president of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. He is also the author of *The Shaping of an Effective Leader* and is the coauthor of *Longing for God* with Richard J. Foster.

A Human-Centered Approach to Decision-Making

What have been some of your biggest hurdles you have faced and how have they shaped your life?

Gayle Beebe: The biggest hurdles I have faced in life are ones related to the problem of evil and suffering. For many years, I viewed setbacks and challenges as barriers to a meaningful life as well as my effectiveness as a leader. But as my life and leadership responsibilities have grown, I have come to see them as divine passageways that lead me to a deeper understanding and appreciation for life and the complexity and challenges that are integral to it. It is out of these experiences that I have developed a love and appreciation for the many ways we gain wisdom and insight, the touchstone of a life well-lived.

In this book, do you view obstacles as setbacks or opportunities for leaders?

Gayle: We often see setbacks and disasters as events that encroach on our leadership and keep us from our best life. Instead, we need to see them as opportunities to grow and change. Often, these initial setbacks are disorienting. But over time, we come to see them as defining experiences that change the way we see, provide deeper insight and understanding, and help us make a meaningful response.

In what way has writing this book been a gift to you as the author?

Gayle: I loved getting to write this book as it has given me the opportunity to understand my life with God at such a deeper level. While returning to some of the most painful and challenging experiences of my life has been a daunting challenge at times, it has also helped me consolidate more understanding about the ways in which God intersects each one of our lives in ways that provide meaning and purpose. What a joy and privilege.

Share five key ideas shared in the book.

Gayle: The five key ideas center around intuition, suffering, perception, perseverance, and eternity.

1. Intuition is critical to effective leadership and is a kind of knowledge held unconsciously but built up consciously by reading, observing, and reflecting. I want to identify and amplify disciplines and activities that help us understand our various circumstances and how we can learn to create appropriate responses.

2. Crucibles bring suffering, but they also produce fresh insight and offer transformative opportunities that shape our character and refine our approach.

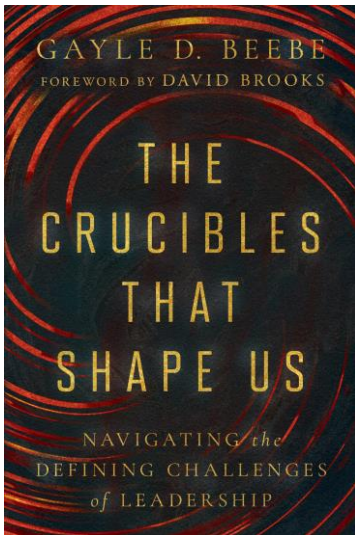


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"I want to use this book to amplify the ways in which God is present to us as we go through life including these unique episodes of life that feel like huge setbacks when they really turn out to be the foundation of human existence that makes wisdom and meaning possible. I am especially interested in how these experiences help leaders connect empathetically with the people they lead so that there is a human-centered approach to all our decision-making."

—Gayle D. Beebe

3. We must learn how to look beyond the presenting issue to see the deeper reality at play. T. S. Eliot writes about people who "... have the experience but miss the meaning." This is so often true in both life and leadership. How we learn to look and see, to perceive reality accurately, is critical to our effectiveness and success.

4. Human treachery and human suffering are two experiences that often erode our energy and interest in solving great problems. But don't give up or even give in. Perseverance is critical. Anything worth doing almost always takes longer than you think it will. Always have a vision that motivates you to triumph over the inconvenience.

5. Mark Twain famously writes that the two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you figure out why. The "second day" is really from day two to eternity, encompassing the full expanse of your life. I want you to reflect on how you hope you'll be remembered.



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