

***RUNNING***  
*with* ***Turtles***

# Bill Wilson

New York, New York

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# Introduction

*If you see a turtle sitting on a fencepost, you can bet he didn't get there by himself!*

—Alex Haley (1921-1992)<sup>1</sup>

**T**urtles belong on the ground or in the water. That is their natural habitat. A turtle on a fence post is quite an unusual sight and elicits the question, "How did it get there?" In an interview with

the renowned author of the blockbuster book and movie, *Roots*, Anne Crowley reports seeing a picture in Alex Haley's home of a turtle positioned on top of a fence post. When asked about the picture Haley responded, "*Anytime you see a turtle on top of a fence post, you know he had some help.*"

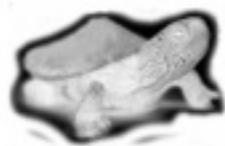
Most Christians that I've met in the past fifty years of full-time ministry move so slow that they can't get out of their own way. They've been stuck on one speed because of the church they grew up in, the denomination they're a part of, habits they've formed over the years—all things that keep them from making a difference. Don't get me wrong, they want to make a difference, but in order for that to happen, something has to change. If you're going to choose to run with turtles, your options are limited.

## Running With Turtles

I've had to learn to run with people in this turtle adventure. In doing so, I've found that either I have to slow down to their pace or get out in front of them and encourage them to pick up their own pace. Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit, or 100 degrees Celsius depending on what part of the world you're reading this in. It does not boil at 210 or 211; but at 212 degrees there is a moment when the heat forces the water to change. At that exact moment, it becomes unrecognizable from what it was moments before. My prayer is that this book will bring about that moment in your life—a defining moment when you will no longer be what you once were, but you will become unrecognizable to those around you.

This book is the story of the many characters in the Bible who were placed on a fence post and demonstrated that they belonged there, above those other turtles that walked below them. Their prominence was made possible by their commitment to a higher purpose that was motivated by a higher law—the law of love.

*Running with Turtles* is for men and women who face the challenges that life brings them and discover victory in the midst of conflict. On the anvil of conflict and controversy our lives can be forged into a mighty weapon for the purposes of God. The Lord has helped me, and through this book, I believe it will help some turtles get faster and stand out amongst others.



## Chapter 1

# The Power of Influence: You Are a Cedar to Somebody

*Every soul that touches yours  
be it the slightest contact gets  
there from some good  
some little grace, one kindly thought;  
one inspiration yet unfelt.<sup>1</sup>*

**H***owl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled:  
howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come  
down (Zechariah 11:2).*

At a quick glance I can imagine you are thinking, "What does this verse have to do with anything?" I have always loved the Old Testament, and I see things that I don't believe others see. In this verse is a powerful

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truth, hidden from the eyes of the ordinary reader. In a nutshell, here is the truth in this verse: You are a cedar to somebody.

The Hebrew language is more metaphoric, while the Greek language is more didactic. The writers of the Old Testament drew pictures with their words and there was always a hidden meaning behind those pictures. Many of the words had prophetic meaning attached to them. The writers of the Old Testament often used trees as metaphors for kings and kingdoms. Over the years I have studied and preached a lot on this subject. Some of the titles of those messages go like this: "When the Axe is Laid to the Root of the Tree," "Whose Branches Run Over the Wall," and "Leave the Fruit Trees Alone."

When you consider trees, branches, fruit, leaves, stumps, and roots, they're always used as a metaphor and a type of something that can be applied in our lives. There are many kinds of trees mentioned in the Bible, such as the fig tree, olive tree, acacia, sycamore, terabinth, almond, oak, cedar, fir and others. All of these trees have symbolic meaning.

Whether you like it  
or not, your life has  
influence on others.

In this verse, three specific trees are mentioned: fir, cedar and oak. The great trees in the forest, like the cedar and the oak, have a profound influence on the lesser, smaller trees that they dwarf. They provide covering and protection. In the context of this verse, these trees have huge prophetic meaning. The prophetic message is clear. Whether you like it or not, your life has influence on others. You do not live in a vacuum. Your life touches others and the more exposure you have on others, the greater

the influence, for good or for evil. One of the keys to leadership is influence. It is even greater than authority. Your position in life determines the degree of that influence.

## Cedars of Lebanon

I am sure that you have heard the term, *Cedars of Lebanon*. They are mentioned throughout the Old Testament with great admiration. Wherever these great trees grew, they were considered to be the glory of Lebanon, where these great cedar trees grew. They were described as majestic, powerful and excellent. In Ezekiel 31:3-5 the Assyrian power is compared to:

*. . . a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth.*

The wood of the cedar has always been highly prized. David had a house of cedar built for him by Hiram, king of Tyre (2 Samuel 5:11). Cedar timber was very much used in the construction of Solomon's temple and palace. These trees were cut down in Lebanon by Sidonians under orders of the King of Tyre (1 Kings 5:6-10).

"As young trees, cedars are cone-shaped, but as they age, the branches spread and flatten. Cedars of Lebanon grow up to 90 feet tall and may live 3000 years."<sup>2</sup> The wood of the cedar trees was a popular building commodity that was used for trusses, beams, ceilings, pillars and foundations. One last valuable thing about the cedar tree is that its resin

preserves it from rot and insects.

## The Mighty Oak

The oak trees were well-known in biblical times for their majestic height and massive trunks. Because of this they were a symbol of power and pride as indicated in Isaiah 2:12-13. *For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan . . .*

The wood from the oak trees of Bashan were used to make the oars that were used to power their ships.

The oak tree was often used as a place of rest and retreat as seen in 1 Kings 13:14, *And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am.*

In 1 Chronicles 10:12 we discover that the mighty oak was used as a burial ground: *They arose, all the valiant men, and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days.*

Joshua took the book of the law and planted it under a mighty oak as seen in Joshua 24:26. *And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.*

Finally, as seen in the words of Ezekiel 6:13, the oak was often chosen as a place of great idolatry. *Then shall ye know that I am the LORD, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols.*

## The Humble Fir

Now, we reach the final tree in this study: the fir tree, sometimes known as the pine fir. The fir tree was much more humble than the glorious cedar and the mighty oak. It wasn't small or flimsy, but lesser in stature and use than the other two. The fir tree was straight and plain and had the same protective resin as the cedar. It was used to make furniture and musical instruments in Old Testament times. *And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals* (2 Samuel 6:5).

It is covered with a fruit, better known to us as a pine cone, and becomes an edible nut as indicated in Hosea 14:8: *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.*

The fir tree has been referred to in the book of Isaiah as a sign of restoration and deliverance. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut of* (Isaiah 55:13).

## Under a Covering or a Crushing

So, you have these forests where the cedars of Lebanon and the powerful oak trees grow. Right next to them, growing in the exact same forest, are the little fir trees. There they are, side by side, growing together on Mount Herman.

Consider this picture. The small fir tree lives under the protective covering of the mightier trees in the forest. When a great storm slams into the forest, the cedar and the oak are impacted by the power of

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wind and rain because they stick up higher and are more exposed to the storm. The small tree experiences none of the excitement and drama of the storm and no one notices. If

A spiritual cedar is a person who has withstood the tests of time, who has grown strong and matured and has huge influence over the lives of those who follow them, listen to them and are exposed to them.

the fir tree falls, who will notice? But if the cedar falls, or if the oak falls, the effect of that fall is horrific for the smaller trees that are impacted. With one great crash it could crush and destroy many of the smaller trees. These great trees can be a covering or a crushing. They can protect or they can pulverize. They can shield or squash.

Because of its closeness to the cedar or oak, the fir comes under a powerful influence of these trees, for good or for bad. As

it is for the trees of the forest, so it is in the life of mankind. We either influence others or we are influenced by others.

A spiritual cedar is a person who has withstood the tests of time, who has grown strong and matured and has huge influence over the lives of those who follow them, listen to them and are exposed to them. They have great influence over the young lives around them. The way they live their lives can either cover and protect or crush and pound.

Before I move on, I want to make one thing clear. It is my personal rule on how I respond to the fall of a leader, whether they are a pastor or a television personality. Here it is: I have nothing to say. I choose to not be drawn into the gossip and blather of others who want to chatter on about the fall of a leader. I reject the superficial spirituality of those

who seek to know more, so they can pray.

Number one, we don't necessarily know all that is going on, and secondly, it is not our business. People love to gossip under the guise of a phony position. It has nothing to do with anybody wanting to pray for someone. People just like to talk. They like to gossip. They like to tear people down. It is unfortunate, but it is true. Eleanor Roosevelt said that "great minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Small

**Leaders need to be careful because the higher they go, the greater the danger.**

minds discuss people." <sup>3</sup> Someone else said that gossip is the opiate of the masses. There is a certain inclination to want to engage in "juicy" stuff. But that fondness for rumors must be tamed and conquered.

Better to pray and shut your mouth. That's why most people do not approach me on this kind of thing because they know I just refuse to take the bait. I don't get drawn into the gossip, into the foolishness, and into "what do you think?"

Number two, leaders need to be careful because the higher they go, the greater the danger. As someone has said, "New levels, new devils." There is the temptation to think that we are a little bit better, a little bit smarter, and a little bit stronger than those around us. Pride comes before a fall. When our eyes shift from how great God is to how great we are there will be trouble.

## What's YOUR Kryptonite?

Kryptonite is a meteor-like substance that was found on Superman's home planet, Krypton. Whenever Superman was exposed to that glowing green substance, he was weakened and left helpless. His enemies used Kryptonite to debilitate him and bring him down. Now,

let me state this: all of us deal with stuff, and you had better know what your kryptonite is. What are the weak and vulnerable areas of your life?

Everybody has a kryptonite. Everybody, I don't care who you are. Everybody has it. I have it, and you have it. I have dealt with anger all my life. I still deal with it. I have no problem talking about it. I'll probably deal with it all my life, but you know what? I'm smart enough to know it. So, do you know what I have to do? I have to make sure I don't allow myself to get put into a position where my anger gets the best of me. I don't have any problem telling you this because all of us need to realize we have something that we deal with. If you don't know what your kryptonite is, you might just fall prey to its power. If you ignore it, it will bite you.

The apostle Paul talked about his thorn in the flesh—his kryptonite—describing it as a weakness that helped keep him from rising to the place of spiritual pride. He begged God to take it away. Finally, God responded to Paul's prayer with these words: *And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Kryptonite can only be conquered by the power of grace, the place where our weakness is transformed into strength.

Too many people think that they are invincible and it is only when they fall that they discover their own personal kryptonite. Your kryptonite is going to be different than mine. Human kryptonite comes in many different forms: anger, lust, fear, insecurity and many other forms. You may be dealing with a myriad of kryptonite. Dealing with it begins with acknowledging it. Once you see it then you must protect yourself from people or situations that will cause you to fall. Don't let dirty thoughts or people with dirty feet get into your head.

I have my kryptonite. You've got yours. We all need to be working on it every day. I do. I have learned that when exposed to my kryptonite,

## The Power of Influence: You Are a Cedar to Somebody

I must be cautious. I need insight into the nature of the kryptonite and exercise discernment when confronted with a situation that might weaken me. A good example is about the

guy that walks down the same road five times and falls in the same hole. No matter what he does, he never sees the hole and always falls in. What would your advice be to that guy? Go down a different road.

**Before you can  
heal others, you  
must be healed.**

It is as simple as that. Avoid those places and/or people that expose you to your own kryptonite.

You need to take care of your own self because you are a cedar to somebody. If you take care of yourself, you won't hurt others. Before you can heal others, you must be healed. You won't find this in most leadership books, but it is an important principle. What you do and who you are has tremendous impact on others. Best to find your kryptonite before it hurts you and someone else.

## You Are a Cedar to Somebody

You're a cedar to somebody. Somebody grows beneath your branches. You need to get this. This is a truth that must be thoroughly understood by all of those in places of power and influence. I don't always like being responsible. Does that surprise you? I am responsible for so much, that if anyone gives me one more thing to be responsible for, I'm going to explode. I do not need one more responsibility in my life. But that's what I signed up for. If you want to be in the ministry, or any

leadership position, don't complain when you have to work hard and be responsible for others. If you want to be in leadership, don't complain when you have to put in more hours. Don't complain when you are

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misunderstood. This is what you signed up for. If you don't want to be in a place of influence, go sell cars or work at a fast food restaurant.

It's something like getting a driver's license. When you are old enough, you have the right to get a driver's license. However, with that right come responsibilities. You have to obey the laws of the road. You have to drive defensively. You have to be careful and vigilant. Every right is accompanied with a responsibility.

Being a cedar to others requires much. How you approach that responsibility is critical. To be effective you have to keep God in His rightful place. Is He the steering wheel or is He a spare tire? He's one or the other. Either He steers you, directs you, guides you, OR you take the steering wheel and become the master controller. If you are going to be a positive influence on others, you need to live under His control. You are a cedar to somebody. Somebody is under your influence. Example is not the main thing in influencing others—it is the *only* thing.

### If The Cedar Falls, Many Will Fall

The fir tree is not as influential as the cedar. If one of the kids in our Sunday school falls, it will not affect the teacher and it will not be as impactful as the teacher falling. The fewer the number of people in your life and degree of influence determines the extent that your

possible failure will have on others. The greater the influence, the greater the damage it will have.

If you are in a place of leadership, your fall will impact many. I have worked with hundreds of people over the years, and I am extremely cautious about who I put in a place of influence in our ministry. I am not looking for names or degrees. I am looking for faithfulness, tested character, and proven worth. I cannot entrust the lives of these kids into the hands of a novice who is more interested in position than service, the pulpit rather than the street. Who

you are is just as important as what you do. I look for people who understand these truths.

When you move into places of responsibility and influence you become a cedar to somebody. Ask yourself right now, who are you a cedar to this day? Who is looking at you today? Who is watching you today? Who is depending on you today? Who is looking forward to seeing

**Who is watching you today? Who is depending on you today? Who is looking forward to seeing you today?**

you today? Who is waiting for you to arrive today? Who is going to be waiting for you to arrive tomorrow? Who is depending on you to preach? Who's depending on you to lead? Because you are a cedar to somebody, if you fail, it will have a negative effect on others.

Athletes in the world of sports are role models whether they like it or not. If they should fall, it can be devastating to those young kids who love and follow them. In some ways we are all role models—people of influence—but the greater your influence and following, the greater for good or for evil. Just like the mighty oak tree, the greater your sphere of influence, the greater damage you can do if you fall.

When Mexican politician and general Santa Ana (1794-1876) was meeting with his men the night before they went into the Battle of the Alamo, the pivotal event in the Texas Revolution, he told them that

when they got inside the walls of the Alamo that they were to shoot the men with the brass buttons on their uniforms. What did that mean? Take out their leaders. Aim for them. Take them out. By the way, that's exactly what the devil does, because he's smart enough to know that if you can take out the leader, you can bring down the house.

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*The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!*  
(2 Samuel 1:19). Saul and Jonathan had just fallen at the hands  
of the enemy, and David lamented the demise of

**You might be able  
to dodge your  
responsibilities,  
but you will never  
be able to dodge  
the consequences  
of avoiding your  
responsibilities.**

these great leaders in Israel. No one is too great that they cannot experience the shambles of Saul. Their fall not only destroys their fortunes, but it destroys the fortunes of others. When a leader or a government fails, everyone under them is adversely affected.

Both the cedar and the fir tree were used in the house of God. Both were needed. The difference is in the place they are used. If the ceiling, made of fir, should crash, it is not as devastating

as if the cedar foundation should collapse. Both are important, but one has greater consequence than the other. The higher you climb the leadership ladder, the greater the impact on those beneath you.

## The Price of Greatness is Responsibility

One of the major truths of this book is that the higher up the ladder you go, the more your underwear shows. In other words, the higher you go, the greater your exposure. The greater the exposure you have, the greater your responsibility. The willingness to accept responsibility for your life and the lives of others is a sign of great character. Once you have become responsible for someone, you are being moved to another level. You have just become a cedar to somebody, and your responsibility has increased. In the future, you might be able to dodge your responsibilities, but you will never be able to dodge the consequences

of avoiding your responsibilities.

Are leaders perfect? Well, I haven't found a perfect leader, and I doubt that you have. As we have already stated, we all have our kryptonite. The difference is that great leaders have learned how to live responsibly and in the awareness of those weaknesses. They live in the constant awareness that they are shaping the lives of others and must be careful about what enters their thinking and what influences their actions. When you are in a position of leadership or influence, there are eyes watching you everywhere you go. If you cannot accept that and if you feel that the burden is too great, then leadership is not for you.

Whether you like it or not, responsible leadership will affect your privacy. I'm not saying that this is either right or wrong. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying that I even like it. I remember one time that I had made one of my many trips to Tulsa. I had just landed at the airport and all I wanted to do was go to the Rib Crib, my favorite restaurant in Tulsa. The timing was perfect. I would avoid the rush. All I wanted to do was relax in peace as I dove into the food. It was a very busy time of the year, traveling and trying to get everything ready for our Christmas season. I was tired and hungry and just wanted to get to the Rib Crib that was just down the street from Oral Roberts University. We got to the restaurant, and I ordered my little chicken sandwich, beans and their delicious coleslaw.

I'm very predictable. I could eat the same thing every day. Just as I was ready to dive into the food, I heard someone with a shrill voice yell my name. I can't say what I was thinking. All I wanted to do was eat my little sandwich, eat my beans, and be left alone. I guess it was inevitable. I have preached in that town so many times. But, I just wanted to eat without drama. In the midst of those irritating feelings, I thought to myself, *What do you expect? You're on television all over the world. You are doing this because you have to raise the money for*

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*the ministry. Everything hinges on you sharing the vision and motivating people to stand with you. And now you're mad because they won't let you eat your beans in peace?* All of a sudden, I just started laughing at the absurdity of it all. The more I thought about it, the harder I laughed. What else could I do? Others see when you lead! There is no escaping it. Therefore, you must accept it.

## Finding Your Level

One thing that I have always tried to communicate to others is the need to constantly be who you are. Whether I am preaching on a platform or eating at the Rib Crib, I always seek to be consistent with the person that I am. That's why I don't put on a show on the platform like many television preachers do. Too much of it is for show. I can't do that. I won't do that. I am what I am. I won't pretend to be something that I am not. I don't go into a "preaching mode." Please understand me. I have found a level of life that I can live. I know what it takes to do what I do, and I have found a level in life that I am content with. I feel comfortable in my own skin and don't need to act like others. I don't try to do more or less than I can. And I would challenge you to do the same.

We will never find our level until we are willing to go beyond where we have ever gone. Don't seek more, but don't settle for less. I have watched some folks come to our ministry and stay here for many years. They have faithfully served. They have sacrificed much. They found their level. Others could not make it for a month. They didn't find a level. Some of them have never found it.

I couldn't imagine myself living in any other place. New York City is my home. I am comfortable here. I am not a small town guy. You

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might be different. The city might not be for you. You have to find your own level, your own place, your own ministry that is divinely designed for you. Wherever you are, you will find your level if you don't give up. Your place becomes the space where you are trained, equipped, and released. You have to discover what you can do and what you cannot do, what you can and cannot endure. Many could not do what I do: the constant travel, the long days and nights, the burden I bear for others, the stress of raising enough money to support our vision and much, much more. I had to find my own level of what I can handle. You have to find yours for yourself.

Whatever your level is, it will require denying yourself, putting others first, making the sacrifice, enduring indifference and misunderstanding, surviving the storms and remaining faithful in all you do.

I remember the day when I got the report that my home pastor had committed suicide. In the report they recorded that after they broke down the door, they said it looked like he was trying to reach for the telephone. I don't know what that means. I've tried not to read too much into it. Here is the truth. This man, who had influenced my life so much, had fallen. You are a cedar to somebody, aren't you? Wherever you go, somebody is looking at you. The very small things you do impacts others. A simple hug, a passing pat on the back, a listening ear or some other sign of caring! Conversely, a negative act can influence people. An ignoring look, an uncaring act, or a dreadful fall! I don't know who's watching you today. I'm not even sure I know who's watching me, but my prayer is that you will realize that you have influence and you have impact on the lives of others. I pray that you will always live in the awareness of that great truth.