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**Insights for Congregations from the Writings of Jim Collins**

**Compilation and Implications by**

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**Jim Collins. *How The Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In*.**

**Jim Collins, 2009.**

**(Purchase on Amazon at** [**https://amzn.to/2ApCY1W**](https://amzn.to/2ApCY1W)**)**

**Insight 001:** “The seeds of decline can be detected early. And as long as you don’t fall all the way to the fifth stage, decline can be reversed.” (Collins, 2009, p. xiv)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When the clarity of vision and the effectiveness of strategies begin to wane is the time to consider the next season of a congregation’s life. Waiting too long to can bring sadness, disappointment, and even anger.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 002:** “I’ve come to see institutional decline like a staged disease; harder to detect but easier to cure in the early stages, easier to detect but harder to cure in the later stages. An institution can look strong on the outside but already be sick on the inside, dangerously on the cusp of precipitous fall.” (Collins, 2009, p. 5)

*Implications for Congregations:* “In the Maturity season of a congregation’s life, the typical response to diminished vision and effectiveness is denial. Many people do not see the need to consider the next season of a congregation’s life. This is a shame as this is when the congregation may have the greatest resources to address their future. Later when their situation is more obvious, their resources are fewer.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 003:** “Every institution is vulnerable, no matter how great. No matter how much you’ve achieved, no matter how far you’ve gone, no matter how much power you’ve garnered, you are vulnerable to decline. There is no law of nature that the most powerful will inevitably remain at the top. Anyone can fall and most eventually do.” (Collins, 2009, p. 8)

*Implications for Congregations:* “God’s world is a dynamic world. Congregations are dynamic spiritual organisms. Transition and change are a typical part of congregational seasons. Congregations –even from the beginning of their life – often fail to engage in continual transitions and changes and ignore the pattern of congregational seasons. Eventually all congregations will experience decline and even dysfunction. It is inevitable.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 004:** “Having studied both sides of the coin, how companies become great *and* how companies fall, I’ve concluded that there are more ways to fall than to become great.” “It turns out that a company can indeed look like the picture of health on the outside yet already be in decline, dangerously on the cusp of a huge fall.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 18-19)

*Implications for Congregations:* “One of many reasons congregations deny they are on the cusp or fully in decline is that on the surface everything looks fine. The traditions they have come to love, seem to be functioning well – even with excellence. Often this is an illusion. In many congregations their vision –which is unseen – diminishes while how they function is still experiencing a visible crescendo of excellence.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 005:** The model presented by Jim Collins consists of five stages that proceed in sequence. Stage 1: Hubris Born of Success. Stage 2: Undisciplined Pursuit of More. Stage 3: Denial of Risk and Peril. Stage 4: Grasping for Salvation. Stage 5: Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death. (Collins, 2009)

*Implications for Congregations:* The five stages presented by Collins are consistent with the five phases of my congregational life cycle developed 40 years ago. These phases are: Early Growth, Late Growth, Prime/Plateau, Early Aging, and Late Aging. Additionally, my ten stages are Birth, Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood, Maturity, Empty Nest, Retirement, Old Age, and Death. (George Bullard)

**Insight 006:** In Stage 1, “great enterprises can become insulated by success; accumulated momentum can carry an enterprise forward, for a while, even if its leaders make poor decisions or lose discipline. Stage 1 kicks in when people become arrogant, regarding success virtually as an entitlement, and they lose sight of the true underlying factors that created success in the first place.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 20-21)

*Implications for Congregations:* “How a congregation is founded is important. It must be captured by God’s empowering vision from the very beginning. Yet, two things can derail it early. First, is if the pastor is not only the chief person casting vision – a good thing – but is the only one who deeply owns the vision and thus seeks to control it – a bad thing. Second, if the leadership capacities of others are not developed and encouraged, then the congregation may experience arrested development.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 007:** In Stage 2 enterprises can become overly focused on “more scale, more growth more acclaim, more of whatever those in power see as ‘success’.” “When an organization grows beyond its ability to fill its key seats with the right people, it has set itself up for a fall.” (Collins, 2009, p. 21)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Church growth is a result of faithful, effective, and innovative ministry. When more numbers, more success becomes the focus then if it stops happening, the congregation may enter a season of conflict. This especially happens when a core group of leaders – including the pastor – stretch their leadership efforts too thin without developing the next generation of leaders.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 008:** In Stage 3, “internal warning signs begin to mount, yet external results remain strong enough to ‘explain away’ disturbing data or to suggest that the difficulties are ‘temporary’ or ‘cyclic’ or ‘not that bad, and ‘nothing is fundamentally wrong. In Stage 3, leaders discount negative data, amplify positive data, and put a positive spin on ambiguous data.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 21-22)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The early signs of waning success for a congregation can be that it has been more than seven years since the congregation has taken a spiritual and strategic sabbatical to seek a fresh sense of God’s empowering vision. When the metrics of the congregation plateau, the congregation may simply deny that anything is wrong when within the next few years many things may be wrong.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 009:** In Stage 4, “the cumulative peril and/or risks-gone-bad of Stage 3 assert themselves, throwing the enterprise into a sharp decline visible to all. The critical question is, How does its leadership respond? By lurching for a quick salvation or by getting back to the disciplines that brought about greatness in the first place? Those who grasp for salvation have fallen into Stage 4.” (Collins, 2009, p. 22)

*Implications for Congregations:* “In Stage 3 congregations and their leadership can get away with denying that anything is wrong. In Stage 4 the signs of nostalgia, disappointment and ultimately anger are increasingly obvious throughout the congregation. Long-term members experience melancholy and ultimately depression. The desire is to return to yesterday, or try harder, or replace an ineffective pastor or staff persons. None of these is the answer.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 0010:** Stage 4 in organizational life is *Grasping for Salvation*. “Common ‘saviors’ include a charismatic visionary leader, a bold but untested strategy, a radical transformation, a dramatic cultural revolution, a hoped-for-blockbuster product, a ‘game changing’ acquisition, or any number of other silver-bullet solutions. Initial results from taking dramatic action may appear positive, but they do not last.” (Collins, 2009, p. 22)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When congregations are *Grasping for Salvation,* they often seek a new pastor with a dramatic vision and bold strategy who will help them restore past glory. Often, they are dissatisfied with the leadership of the new pastor because the transformation initiated changes the character and nature of the congregation. They wanted transformation without undesirable changes. The result may be a series of short-term pastors seeking to discover the one that will change them only in the way they want change.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 0011: “**In Stage 5, accumulated setbacks and expensive false starts erode financial strength and individual spirit to such an extent that leaders abandon all hope of building a great future. In some cases, their leaders just sell out; in other cases, the institution atrophies into utter insignificance; and in the most extreme cases, the enterprise simply dies outright.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 22-23)

*Implications for Congregations:* Stage 5 corresponds to the Old Age and Death stages of the congregational life cycle. It is when the management processes and cultural captivity of the congregation control virtually everything the congregation does on a week-by-week and year-by-year basis. Congregations are in a survival model and only something miraculous that is beyond them will save them from a painful emotional and spiritual death. Still, many – or not most – congregations hang on as long as they can allowing their church facilitates and their spiritual and strategic vitality as a congregation to deteriorate. (George Bullard)

**Insight 012:** “We do ourselves a disservice by studying only success.” “One of the keys to sustained performance lies in understanding how greatness can be lost.” “With a roadmap of decline in hand, institutions heading downhill might be able to apply the brakes early and reverse course.” “Our research indicates that organizational decline is largely self-inflicted, and recovery largely within our own control.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 24-25)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations are organic. They grow and develop, and they also age and decline. But sustained decline is not inevitable. It is a season that can be reversed by the next season. The key is for congregations to realize and accept early on a season of decline when transitions and changes are essential. It is much better to look forward to the new thing God can do in and through congregations rather than looking back to what God did in a former season. Congregations must let go of the past and focus on the future. It is the same thing we tell individuals when they are going through life crises. It also works for congregations.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 013:**  “Just because you may have made mistakes and fallen into the stages of decline does not seal your fate. So long as you never fall all the way to Stage 5, you can rebuild a great enterprise worthy of lasting.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 25-26)

*Implications for Congregations:* “There is no shame for a congregation who experiences a season or two of decline. Internal congregational dynamics and external community transition and change can empower decline for which the congregation is unable to have an adequate response. Over the long-term, too many congregations decline to the Old Age Stage – which corresponds to Collins’ Stage 5 – where they are on life support and delay or refuse to face this reality. They are hoping for something miraculous to happen as they know they are unable to turn their situation around without it.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 014:** “It’s far better to create your own future repeatedly, than to wait for external forces to dictate your choices.” At all costs it is important to avoid “a cultural shift from humility to arrogance.” Especially “outrageous arrogance that inflicts suffering upon the innocent.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 27-29)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Successful, significant, and sacrificial congregations recreate themselves every seven years starting with their first seventh year of existence and every seven years thereafter. They never bask in their success, but always with humility remain sensitive to the new opportunities along their journey. They never declare they have found the Holy Grail of congregational success as they realize this does violence to their journey and the people they serve. They see such arrogance as sin.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 015:** “A core business that meets a fundamental human need—and one at which you’ve become best in the world – rarely becomes obsolete.” ((Collins, 2009, p 32)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The often used phrase – ‘Let’s keep the main thing the main thing’ – applies to every congregation. The core focus by which a congregation is called of God, spiritually-gifted, life-skilled, and has a contextually relevant preference needs to be the main thing. Too often congregations become captivated by culturally pleasing programs, ministries, and activities rather than being captured by God’s empowering vision. When congregations abandon their core mission and vision, they may become obsolete.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 016:** “To disrespect the potential remaining in your primary flywheel – or worse, to neglect the flywheel out of boredom while you turn your attention to The Next Big Thing in the arrogant belief that its success will continue almost automatically – is hubris.” (Collins, 2009, p. 35)

[“The Flywheel analogy captures brilliantly the dynamic of implementing strategy through thousands and thousands of small results aligned in the same direction.” (<http://strategictoolkits.com/strategic-concepts/flywheel/>)]

*Implications for Congregations:* “Continual transition and changes or continuous incremental innovation are good day-to-day strategies for congregations. Bad strategies are to abandon or undermine the core mission, vision, and strategy of congregations for the new “shiny object” or “silver bullet” that someone suggests. Congregations should do what they do well and continually innovate on what they do well until such time a significant paradigm shift involving a new vision from God empowers a different direction.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 017:** “If you’re struggling with the tension between continuing your commitment to what made you successful and living in fear about what comes next, ask yourself two questions: 1. Does your primary flywheel face inevitable demise within the next five to ten years due to forces outside your control – will it become impossible for it to remain best in the world with a robust economic engine? 2. Have you lost passion for your primary flywheel?” (Collins, 2009, p. 35)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations must look ahead and anticipate what the next season of their life might bring forth in the context where they serve. Doing so and engaging in continuous incremental innovation may allow the ministry of the congregation to remain faithful, effective, and innovative. If, however, congregations have lost passion for their spiritual and strategic journey, it is time to plot a new course.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 018:** “Like an artist who pursues both enduring excellence *and* shocking creativity, great companies foster a productive tension between continuity *and* change.” (Collins, 2009, p. 36)

*Implications for Congregations:* “One of the things that makes the tension between continuity and change so difficult for congregations is that the core message of the gospel of Jesus Christ does not change. This is the substance of the gospel. Change comes in the strategy and structure of how we apply the gospel message to real life situations. Too often congregations confuse the message with the medium. The medium in which the gospel is expressed must continually transition and change to connect with people far away from as well as those close to God.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 019:** “When institutions fail to distinguish between current practices and the enduring principles of their success, and mistakenly fossilize around their practices, they’ve set themselves up for decline.” (Collins, 2009, p. 36)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations often confuse tactics with strategies. Tactics are the specific ways strategies are implemented. Tactics should be dynamic and changeable from year-to-year, and season-to-season. Strategies often have implications for multiple years. In a recent meeting with one church a team was discussing a strategy in which they engage every several years. To plan it this time they gathered a group of people who are worked on this project multiple times, pulled out the file of how they have done it several times, and stuck with the old plan. Affirming their current practice undercuts their ability to be innovative and creative. Fossilization results.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 020:** “Companies that change constantly but without any consistent rationale will collapse just as surely as those that change not at all.” (Collins, 2009, p. 38)

*Implications for Congregations:* “A key question that many congregations fail to ask themselves when they implement change is *Why*? Change is good but change without knowing why can be bad. Small tactical changes keep congregations fresh and inspire innovation. Major changes require a clear new empowering vision from God and a way to measure significance, but not just a desire to do something different.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 021:** “”Like inquisitive scientists, the best corporate leaders we’ve research remain students of their work, relentlessly asking questions—why, why, why?—and have an incurable compulsion to vacuum the brains of people they meet.” (Collins, 2009, p. 39)

*Implications for Congregations:* “High achieving ministry leaders do not just read a book and decide to try that in their congregation. They devour a book, talk to colleagues about it, ask why this works, and then figure out if the concepts and ideas presented ought to apply in their congregation. Low achieving ministry leaders are simply looking for short-term fixes and carry out whatever the latest book or speaker or denominational program suggests they do.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 022:** “Leaders lose the inquisitiveness and learning orientation that mark those truly great individuals who, no matter how successful they become, maintain a learning curve as steep as when they first began their careers.” (Collins, 2009, p. 43)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The learning orientation of congregational leaders must be a permanent core aspect of their ministry. No pastor, staff person, or lay leader knows it all. About the time they think they do, paradigms shift again, or their community context changes, or a new congregation is launched near them who does not have the baggage of heritage and moves with great nimbleness.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 023:** Overreaching rather than complacency is often the cause of decline in organizations. “People went too far—too much risk, too much leverage, too much financial innovation, too much aggressive opportunism, too much growth.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 49-50)

*Implications for Congregations:* “In some cases congregational leaders are not living into God’s empowering vision for them. They are living into a fantasy of where they can lead their congregation. In doing so they take too much risk, take on debt that assumes an unlikely rate of growth, develop buildings they cannot maintain, seek to build a larger congregation without as adequate strategy to develop disciples as leaders, and stress themselves to the point of burnout until the effort collapses.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 024:** “Hubris can lead to making brash commitments for more and more and more. And then one day, just when you’ve elevated expectations too far, you fall. Hard.” (Collins, 2009, p. 53)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When church growth becomes too much a focus of a congregation that it squeezes out other foci within the life and ministry of the congregation, it can result in a hard fall right when it appears the congregation is doing so well. Balanced growth. Kingdom growth. Measured growth. All of these can produce longer term growth that builds deeper disciples.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 025:** “The greatest leaders do seek growth – growth in performance, growth in distinctive impact, growth in creativity, growth in people – but they do not succumb to growth the undermines long-term value. And they certainly do not confuse growth with excellence. Big does not equal great, and great does not equal big.” (Collins, 2009, p. 54)

*Implications for Congregations***:** “Church growth in a congregation is not a bad thing. It can be a great thing. For it to be healthy and not driven by hubris it must be a balance of good news, good faith, good works, and good community. This can produce both growth and excellence.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 026:** “Problems . . . stem not from growth per se, but from the undisciplined pursuit of more.” “To neglect your core business while you leap after exciting new adventures is undisciplined.” “To compromise your values or lose sight of your core purpose in pursuit of growth and expansion is undisciplined.” (Collins, 2009, p. 55)

*Implications for Congregations:* “An often repeated phrase about faithful, effective, and innovative congregations is that they keep the main thing the main thing. What do you see as the main thing in which your congregation should engage? If it revolves around fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment, you may be fine. If it does not, but you are pursuing more and more, then your congregation’s journey may be undisciplined.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 027:** “If a great company consistently grows revenues faster than its ability to get enough of the right people to implement that growth, it will not simply stagnate; it will fall.” (Collins, 2009, p. 56)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations cannot outgrow their supply lines. What are the supply lines for congregations? They are maturing disciples who are being developed as leaders and deployed in and through the life and ministry of the congregation as spiritual and strategic leaders. Without these supply lines, congregations will stagnate.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 028:** “When bureaucratic rules erode an ethic of freedom and responsibility within a framework of core values and demanding standards, you’ve become infected with the disease of mediocrity.” (Collins, 2009, p. 56)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When congregations move into their third season of life – a stage I call Adolescence – they begin to develop more formal management systems. When doing so, they need to be sure the patterns of freedom and responsibility remain and are not controlled by rules that negatively impact innovation but provide the back infrastructure for innovation to soar with faith.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 029:** “What are the key seats in your organization? What percentage of those seats can you say with confidence are filled with the right people? What are your plans for increasing that percentage? What are your backup plans in the even that a right person leaves a key seat?” (Collins, 2009, p. 57)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The key characteristic of people in congregations who occupy the key seats of leadership is their positive spiritual passion about the future of the congregation based on their understanding of God’s empowering vision for the congregation. The average volunteer to fill a leadership slot and a person with positive spiritual passion are seldom the same people. What is your plan for getting the right people in the right seat of leadership?” (George Bullard)

**Insight 030:** “One notable distinction between wrong people and right people is that the former see themselves as having ‘jobs,’ while the latter see themselves as having *responsibilities*. Every person in a key seat should be able to respond to the question ‘What do you do?’ not with a job title, but with a statement of personal responsibility.” (Collins, 2009, p. 57)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The right people in church leadership can articulate a sense of spiritual calling to what they do. They also see their responsibility to help people grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. The wrong people are too proud that they have a certain job title or position in the congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 031:** “Research shows that “dramatic leaps in performance came when an executive team of exceptional leaders coalesced and made a series of outstanding, supremely well-educated decisions.” (Collins, 2009, p. 58)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When leaders in a congregation are spiritually called to their leadership role and have positive spiritual passion about the future of the congregation toward which God is calling them, they tend to make great decisions about moving the congregation forward in response to God’s leadership.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 032:** “Leaders who fail the process of succession set their enterprises on a path to decline. One of the most significant indicators of decline is the reallocation of power into the hands of leaders who fail to comprehend and/or lack the will to do what must be done – and equally, what must not be done—to sustain greatness.” (Collins, 2009, p. 60)

*Implications for Congregations:* “One of the most significant barriers to sustained greatness for a congregation from one season to the next of their journey is the lack of succession planning. Too much power and influence may rest in the lead pastor to too long that a vacuum is created when the pastor leaves, and chaos results because there is no plan for succession.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 033:** “Succession of leaders may fail because “a domineering leader fails to develop strong successors (or drives strong successors away) and thereby creates a leadership vacuum when he or she steps away.” (Collins, 2009, p. 60)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Lead pastors may fail their congregations by staying around too long making the congregation less desirable for the leader with the capacities needed for the next season of the congregation, or lead pastors refuse to do anything that makes a pathway for succession, or the congregation looks for the next lead pastor to repeat the past rather than embracing the future.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 034:** “The best leaders we’ve studied had a peculiar genius for seeing themselves as not all that important, recognizing the need to build an executive team and to craft a culture based on core values that do not depend upon a single heroic leader.” (Collins, 2009, p. 62)

*Implications for Congregations:* “It is important for lead pastors to not build the culture of their congregation around themselves, but to call to the staff people with spiritual gifts and skills that soar past their own capacities, or to mentor in their network of ministers people who would make great candidates for their congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 035:** “While no leader can single-handily build an enduring great company, the wrong leader vested with power can almost single-handedly bring a company down.” (Collins, 2009, p. 62)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Inadequate leadership by a lead pastor can lead a congregation into a pattern of mediocrity and take them down the aging side of the congregational life cycle to where the next lead pastor has a leadership challenge that can only be met by the miraculous intervention of God.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 036:** “As companies move into Stage 3 (denial of risk and peril) we begin to see the cumulative effects of the previous stages. Stage 1 hubris leads to Stage 2 overreaching, and which set the company up for Stage 3.” (Collins, 2009, p. 68)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Few congregations are ready to experience a loss of vision which occurs as their move from the Adulthood stage of congregation life to the Maturity stage. In spite of attempts to help them see they have lost vision; their first response is often denial because too many signs of health and strength seem to be present in the congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 037:** “The greatest danger comes not in ignoring clear and unassailable facts, but in misinterpreting *ambiguous* data in situations when you face severe or catastrophic consequences if the ambiguity resolves itself in a way that’s not in your favor.” (Collins, 2009, p. 70)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When congregations lose vision, if they get over their denial, they may simply decide to redouble their efforts at doing what was successful in the past. Pushing harder is seldom the solution and in taking this risk, they encounter greater peril.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 038:** “When facing irreversible decisions that have significant, negative consequences if they go awry—what we might call ‘launch decisions’—the case for launch should require a preponderance of empirical evidence that it’s safe to do so.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 73-74)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations at times take risks to move forward and made more church growth or Kingdom progress. If these risks are irreversible then wise congregations make sure the risks fit the empowering vision from God by which they are captivated, engage in meaningful spiritual discernment, weigh the risks through testing and “pilot’ efforts, and amass the resources for the transitions and changes.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 039:** “Great enterprises do make big bets, but they avoid big bets that could blow holes below the waterline. When making risky bets and decisions in the face of ambiguous or conflicting data, ask three questions: 1. What’s the upside, if events turn out well? What’s the downside if events go very badly? Can you live with the downside? Truly?” (Collins, 2009, p. 74)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations do seek to do bold things from time-to-time. When they do, they ought to ask themselves three questions: 1. Is this of God or of the ego or desperation of the congregational leaders? 2. Have we prepared ourselves to engage in God-sized efforts with the necessary resources? 3. Can we live with the results if too few members of our congregation passionately support it?” (George Bullard)

**Insight 040:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – People shield those in power from grim facts, fearful of penalty and criticism for shining light on the harsh realities. People on the Way Up – People bring forth unpleasant facts . . . to be discussed; leaders never criticize those who bring forth harsh realities.” (Collins, 2009, p. 77)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations must have open, honest, insightful dialogue about what is going on in their situation. Leaders must be vulnerable, open to learning, accepting of both praise and criticism, and affirming what is right and building on it while staying aware of barriers to Kingdom growth.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 041:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – People assert strong opinions without providing data, evidence, or a solid argument. People on the Way Up – People bring data, evidence, logic, and solid arguments to the discussion.” (Collins, 2009, p. 77)

*Implications for Congregations:* “More powerful than truth in many congregations is the body of information known as perceived truthful information. Yes, the opinions and perspectives of the congregation are important. But they must not be void of insightful spiritual and strategic insights on opportunities and challenges.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 042:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – The team leader has a very low questions-to-statements ratio, avoiding critical input and/or allowing sloppy reasoning and unsupported opinions. People on the Way Up – The team leader employs a Socratic style, using a high questions-to-statements ratio, challenging people, and pushing for penetrating insight.” (Collins, 2009, p. 77)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregational leaders must ask more questions and make fewer statements – building ownership rather than demanding loyalty. Their questions must focus on spiritual insight, strategic effectiveness, and the fit of programs, projects, and processes they are seeking to implement.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 043:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – Team members acquiesce to a decision yet do not unify to make the decision successful, or worse, undermine the decision after the fact. People on the Way Up – Team members unify behind a decision once made and work to make the decision succeed, even if they vigorously disagreed with the decision.” (Collins, 2009, p. 77)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The longer people have been members of a congregation, the older they are chronologically, and the fewer choices they have to attend other congregations that fit their style and culture, the more they may undermine decisions rather than supporting them if they disagree with the decision. Exemplary staff and lay leaders support in public and in private the decisions made for the good of the overall congregation and the apparent movement of God.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 044:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – Team members seek as much credit as possible for themselves yet do not enjoy the confidence and admiration of their peers. People on the Way Up – Each team member credits other people for success yet enjoys the confidence and admiration of his or her peers.” (Collins, 2009, p. 77)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The now very common statement that suggests it is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit is an important concept for congregations, lay leaders, staff persons, and pastors to keep in mind. In congregations it is the God who should get the ultimate credit. Wise leaders are not talking about how smart they are, but how helpful other people are to fulfilling God’s empowering vision for the congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 045:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – Team members argue to look smart or to improve their own interests rather than argue to find the best answers to support the overall cause. People on the Way Up – Team members argue and debate not to improve their personal position, but to find the best answers to support the overall cause.” (Collins, 2009, p. 77)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Assertive dialogue that examines deeply the good, the bad, the ugly, and beautiful parts of any plan is worthy dialogue as long as it is about the plan and not the people, or about the principles and not the positions we each desire to take. Offer your best spiritual and strategic insights so that God’s plan might emerge out of dialogue and discernment.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 046:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – The team conducts ‘autopsies with blame,’ seeking culprits rather than wisdom. People on the Way Up – The team conducts ‘autopsies without blame,’ mining wisdom from painful experiences.” (Collins, 2009, p. 78)

*Implications for Congregations:* “There is no evidence that playing the blame-game in a congregation helps the congregation to move forward. We are all responsible. There are always things that can be done to improve how we serve God, one another, and the context into which God has sent us to be received. Each new day and opportunity bring another day and opportunity for Kingdom service.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 047:** “Leadership-Team Dynamics: On the Way Down Versus on the Way Up. Teams on the Way Down – Team members often fail to deliver exceptional results, and blame other people or outside factors for setbacks, mistakes, and failures. People on the Way Up – Each team member delivers exceptional results, yet in the event of a setback, each accepts full responsibility and learns from mistakes.” (Collins, 2009, p. 78)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Placing blame is a sign that a congregation may be on the way down the aging side of the congregational life cycle. Accepting responsibility may be a sign that there is an openness and efforts are being made to embrace the new thing God is in the process of doing in and through the congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 048:** “One common behavior of late Stage 3 (and that often carries well into Stage 4) is when those in power blame other people or external factors—or otherwise explain away the data—rather than confront the frightening reality that the enterprise may be in serious trouble.” (Collins, 2009, p. 78)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Denial by congregational leaders that the spiritual and strategic direction of the congregation is off track too often moves from a short-term situation to a long-term defensiveness. Rather than develop positive, proactive strategies to re-envision, refocus, or renew the congregation leaders may simply defend their actions, blame someone else, or blame some cultural or contextual factors. All the while the congregation fails to thrive and be vital and vibrant.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 049:** “Reorganizations and restructuring can create a false sense that you’re actually *doing* something productive. Companies are in the process of reorganizing themselves all the time; that’s the nature of institutional evolution. But when you begin to respond to data and warning signs with reorganization as a primary strategy, you may well be in denial. It’s a bit like responding to a severe heart condition or a cancer diagnosis by rearranging your living room.” (Collins, 2009, p. 80)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When it comes to transition and change once a congregation has lost the empowerment of God vision, often what they engage in is too little, and will eventually become too late. Transition and change that is continuous with the past patterns and practices of the congregation are only effective for a short while. Typically congregations will need transitions and changes that are discontinuous with the past and establish new patterns and practices.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 050:** “There is no organizational utopia. All organizational structures have trade-offs, and every type of organization has inefficiencies. We have no evidence from our research that any one structure is ideal in all situations, and no form of reorganization can make risk and peril melt away.” (Collins, 2009, p. 80)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The search for the singular silver bullet of congregational transition and change that leads to transformation will always fail. In those times when people say that a singular strategy or tactic succeeded in transforming a congregation, they are often ignoring the spiritual presence of a new empowering vision from God that allowed them to go places they had never been before on their journey.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 051:** “Stage 4 (named by Collins as *Grasping for Salvation*) begins when an organization reacts to a downturn by lurching for a silver bullet.” (Collins, 2009, p. 88)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The congregational search for a silver bullet may actually be a sign of significant decline. It may also mark the move from denial to terror that the decline and diminishing of the capacities of the congregation is getting out of control. At this point the congregation -- especially it pastor, staff, and key leaders – may reach out for a silver bullet they believe worked for someone else, and ought to work for them when though the situations where the silver bullet worked were much different.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 052:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Pin hopes on unproven strategies – discontinuous leaps into new technologies, new markets, new businesses – often with much hype and fanfare. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Formulate strategic changes based on empirical evidence, and extensive strategic and quantitative analysis, rather than make bold untested leaps.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Wise congregations will seek third-party assessment of their situation that evaluates current effectiveness and challenges current ineffectiveness, and then engage in research as to what types of strategies seem to be working for congregations facing same or similar opportunities and challenges of a same or similar size context, and season of the congregational life cycle.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 053:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Seek a big, ‘game changing’ acquisition (often based on hoped-for, but as yet unproven, ‘synergies) to transform he company in a single stroke. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Understand that combining two struggling companies never makes one great company, only consider strategic acquisitions that amplify proven strengths.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When two congregations who are struggling, are not captured by God’s empowering vision, and have limited leadership capacity and financial strength merge, then it produces one congregation with the same struggles and only delays the next stage of decline. True mergers are three congregations who come together and create a new congregation with a new vision.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 054:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Make panicky, desperate moves in reaction to threats that can imperil the company even more, draining cash and further eroding financial strengths. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Get the facts, think, and then act (or not) with calm determination; never take actions that will imperil the company long-term.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “There are on silver bullets for congregations. The Lone Ranger does not ride again when panicky, desperate moves are made. Yes, God can break through with direct, dramatic, and divine intervention, but there is no formula or tool that guarantees or produces that experience. It is not initiated by human leadership.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 055:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Embark on a program of radical change, a revolution, to transform or upend nearly every aspect of the company, jeopardizing or abandoning core strengths. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Gain clarity about what is core and should be held firm, and what needs to change, building upon proven strengths and eliminating weaknesses.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Transformation – yes. Revolution – no. Stage 4 should be a time of discontinuous transition and change, but not yet radical transition and change. Certain capacities can be revitalized and renewed that will help a congregation change its course. But it is not time yet to plot a new course to a new destination unless contextual factors demand it.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 056:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Sell people on the promises of a brighter future to compensate for poor results. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Focus on performance, letting tangible results provide the strongest case for a new direction.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “ Selling a congregation on a brighter future for which there is no evidence is like a quarterback launching a Hail Mary pass into the end zone with seconds left on the game clock. Yes, expect the miraculous. No, do not sell people on the miraculous when there is no evidence for it.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 057:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Destroy momentum with chronic restructuring and/or a series of inconsistent big decisions. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Create momentum with a series of good decisions, supremely well executed that build one upon another.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “It does not matter how many times the management structure of a congregation changes – the number of times the bylaws and the policies are updated. At best it will bring a congregation to a neutral place. Only a new empowering vison from God, and a focus on good faith, good community, good works, and the Good News can bring transformation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 058:** “Behaviors That Exemplify and Perpetuate Stage 4 – Search for a leader-as-savior, with a bias for selecting a visionary from the outside who’ll ride in and galvanize the company. Behaviors That Can Help Reverse the Downward Spiral of Stage 4 – Search for a disciplined executive, with a bias for selecting a proven performer from the inside.” (Collins, 2009, p. 90)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The lay leadership may be thinking – ‘If we just had the right pastor.’ At the same time the pastor and staff are thinking – ‘If we just had more committed laypersons.’ The answer is often within us. Are we willing to be transformed so that our congregation can transform? The answer is seldom just changing the leadership because what that may mean both the clergy and the lay leadership have to be changed.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 059:** “Dashed hope follows dashed home follows dashed hope yet again. Companies stuck in Stage 4 try all sorts of new programs, new fads, new strategies, new visions, new cultures, new values, new breakthroughs, new acquisitions, and new saviors. And when one silver bullet fails, they search for another and then yet another.” (Collins, 2009, p. 92.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “I call the season of dashed hopes for congregations the Retirement season. This is a season of repeated short-term fixes that last 18 to 36 months at most, and then the congregation repeats the cycle numerous times getting weaker each round of effort. Some congregations even change pastors each round by forcing out the pastor whose efforts did not work. I have seen congregations who go through these rounds up to seven times before either getting traction or fading into the Old Age season.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 060:** “The signature of mediocrity is not an unwillingness to change. The signature of mediocrity is chronic inconsistency.” (Collins, 2009, p. 92.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The quote from author Lewis Carrol fits here – ‘If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.’ Congregations deep into the aging seasons of their life move from short-term fix to short-term fix without yet knowing where they are headed. This inevitably leads to mediocre performance and a lack of enthusiasm as they do not know where God is leading them.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 061:** “Companies don’t generally find themselves on the verge of death at the start of Stage 4. The companies we studied had taken a tumble at the start of Stage 4, to be sure, but not a lethal one.” (Collins, 2009, p. 92.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “While it is true that the decline and dysfunction of congregations similar to Stage 4 in companies does not mean they are about to die. It does mean that they are losing the capacity to be thriving congregations who are on a vital and vibrant spiritual and strategic journey.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 062:** “When we find ourselves in trouble, when we find ourselves on the cusp of failing, our survival instinct—and our fear—can evoke lurching, reactive behavior absolutely contrary to survival. The very moment when we need to take calm, deliberate action, we run the risk of doing the exact opposite and bringing about the very outcomes we most fear.” (Collins, 2009, p. 96.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “At a certain point in the decline and dysfunction of congregations a sense of panic and desperation may set in. A tendency may exist to do something reckless – which is different than doing something radical—that may actual hasten the decline and dysfunction.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 063:** “In looking at companies in decline, I’m struck by this lesson again: by grasping about in fearful, frantic reaction, late Stage 4 companies accelerate their own demise. Of course, their leaders can later claim, ‘But look at everything we did. We changed everything. We tried everything we could think of. We fired every shot we had and still fell. You can’t blame us for not trying.’” (Collins, 2009, pp. 96-97.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “As congregations continually spin through the Retirement stage of the congregational life cycle, they continually take frantic action, and often replace their pastor multiple times. What they need is some calm, insightful, outside intervention that helps them assess their situation and provide more life-giving choices for their future.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 064:** “As institutions hurtle toward Stage 5, they spiral downward, increasingly out of control. Each cycle—grasping followed by disappointment followed by more grasping—erodes, resources. Cash tightens. Hope fads. Option narrow.” (Collins, 2009, p. 105.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Jim Collins calls Stage 5 *Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death*. These are very hard words for congregations to hear. The denial they had in earlier days of their initial decline and dysfunction turns into a stubborn resistance. They live in a fantasy world about what is happening to their congregation. They do not want to know or speak the truth about their situation. They may carry some guilt they did not do more sooner. They are angry at the people who left the church rather than stayed.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 065:** “We found two basic versions of Stage 5. In the first version, those in power come to believe that capitulation offers a better overall outcome than continuing to fight. In the second version those in power continue the struggle, but they run out of options, and the enterprise either dies outright or shrinks into utter irrelevance compared to its previous grandeur.” (Collins, 2009, p. 105.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Typically in congregations, those who believe the church is dying and cannot turn itself around are discredited and even attacked. They probably leave the congregation. Those who stay regularly run out of choices acceptable to them and rather than being open to innovative choices will look for people within the congregation, or outside the congregation who will tell them what they want to hear.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 066:** “No company we studied was destined to fall all the way to Stage 5, and each company could have made different decisions earlier in the journey to reverse its downward slide. But by the time a company has moved through Stages 1, 2, 3, and 4, those in power can become exhausted and dispirited, and eventually abandon hope. And when you abandon hope, you should begin preparing for the end.” (Collins, 2009, p. 107.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “No church has to die. Churches choose to die when they give up hope. Churches choose to die when they are unwilling to accept outside advice and guidance from people who know what really happens to churches in their situation. Churches choose to die when other churches throw them lifelines and they reject these. Church death is in many situations a choice.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 067:** “Hope alone is not enough, you need enough resources to continue the fight. If you lost the ability to make strategic choices, forced into short-term survival decisions that cripple the enterprise, then the odds of full recovery become increasingly remote.” (Collins, 2009, p. 107.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Yes, theologically our hope is in our Triune God. Yes, there is hope for churches who are willing to embrace choices that will transform who they are and how they serve. But too many congregations in this final stage of congregational live have lost the capacity to make strategic choices and follow through with them.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 068:** “Not all companies deserve to last. Perhaps society is better off getting rid of organizations that have fallen from great to terrible rather than continuing to let them inflict their massive inadequacies on their stakeholders. Institutional self-perpetuation holds no legitimate place in a world of scarce resources; institutional mediocrity should be terminated or transformed into excellence.” (Collins, 2009, p. 111.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Ouch! This declaration from Jim Collins hurts me to even read when I consider the worth and value to God of the people even in congregations which are now surviving as cultural enclaves rather than spiritual communities. Is it ever acceptable to say a congregation does not deserve to live? That is a tough call.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 069:** “The point of the struggle is not just to survive, but to build an enterprise that makes such a distinctive impact on the world it touches, and does so with such superior performance, that it would leave a gaping hole—a hole that could not be easily filled by any other institution—if it ceased to exist.” (Collins, 2009, pp. 111-112.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Is a church that is simply surviving as a cultural enclave truly a New Testament church? Is there evidence that it cultivates good faith and good community, and that it engages in good works and touches the lives of people with the Good News of the gospel? If so, then yes. If not, then no.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 070:**  “If we discovered that organizational decline is a function first and foremost of forces out of our control—and if we discovered that those who fall will inevitably keep falling to their doom—we could rightly indulge in despair. But that is not our conclusion from this analysis, not if you catch decline in Stages 1, 2, or 3. And in some cases, you might even be able to reverse course once in Stage 4, as long as you still have enough resources to get out of the cycle of grasping and rebuild one step at a time.” (Collins, 2009, p. 117.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations can transform if they are willing to engage in continual transition and changes. Congregations can re-thrive after they stop thriving. Congregations can be vital and vibrant once more. The absolute best times to thrive are in Stages 1, 2, and 3 which are the positive developmental stages. By Stage 4 it is essential that congregations do things that are discontinuous with the past. If they wait until Stage 5 then they must do things that are radical regarding the past. If they refuse to transition and change, they will eventually die.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 071:**  “The right leaders feel a sense of urgency in good times and bad, whether facing threat or opportunity, no matter what.” “The right people will drive improvement . . . and they will never take well to manipulation.” (Collins, 2009, p. 117.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “One of the greatest blessings congregations can have at the ‘right’ leaders – pastor, staff, and lay leaders. With the ‘right’ leaders with spiritual focus, strategic insight, and the personality to lead people, congregations can navigate their way through the opportunities and challenges of transition and change.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 072:**  “You have to stop the bleeding first and make sure you don’t run out of cash, but that’s simply emergency surgery, not full recovery. The point being however you slice it, lack of management discipline correlates with decline, and passionate adherence to management disciple correlates with recovery and ascent.” (Collins, 2009, p. 118.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When congregations are experiencing decline and dysfunction it is necessary to stop the bleeding of people and resources. At best that leaves the congregation on a plateau without an empowering vision concerning God’s future. Good management got you to that plateau. Exceptional visionary leadership and God’s empowering vision will help you take the next steps forward.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 073:**  “We believe most leaders in every sector feel they are metaphorically moving higher on the mountain, into increasingly turbulent and unforgiving environments.” (Collins, 2009, p. 119.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Many pastors, staff, and lay leaders in congregations reach a point – even with the best of leadership and management practices – that they do not know what is next. They cautiously stop leading at that point. The bold keep leading and seeking the voice of God for direction, strategy, and tactics.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 074:** “Our research shows that it is possible to build a great institution that sustains exceptional performance for multiple decades, perhaps longer, even in the face of chaos, disruption, uncertainty, and violent change.” (Collins, 20059 p. 119.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “If congregations are willing to engage in continual transition and change both as the gathered church and the scattered church, there are few reasons why they cannot continually sustain exceptional ministry performance. It is the unwillingness to engage in strategic and tactical transition and change while adhering to an unchanging gospel message that causes them to fail.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 075:** “Do not ever capitulate to the idea that an era of success must inevitably be followed by decline and demise brought on by forces outside your control.” (Collins, 2009, p. 120.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “With a commitment that is too shallow, many congregations declare repeatedly the phrase ‘God can do anything but fail’. The issue is they do not believe that about what God can do in and through their congregation. No congregations must fail. Congregations choose to fail.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 076:** “We are not imprisoned by our circumstances, our setbacks, our history, our mistakes, or even staggering defeats along the way. We are freed by our choices.” (Collins, 2009, p. 120.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “What is your congregation choosing? Is it choosing to be significant in its ministry in response to God’s calling? Is it choosing to wait for the return of what the congregation was in the past? Or is it going boldly into God’s future for the congregation?” (George Bullard)

**Insight 077:** In 1941 when England was being attacked by Germany, Churchill said the following in a speech: “‘Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.’ Never give in. Be willing to change tactics, but never give up your core purpose.” (Collins, 2009, p. 123.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Satan wants your congregation to give in. Satan also wants your congregation to be stubborn and refuse to transition and change as the days, weeks, months, years, and decades of the life of your congregation are experienced. Never give in to Satan. Always be willing to continually modulate your strategies and tactics to be the best possible congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Jim Collins. *Good to Great and the Social Sectors: Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer*. Harper Collins, 2005**

**(Purchase on Amazon at** [**https://amzn.to/2YMMaqs**](https://amzn.to/2YMMaqs)**)**

**Insight 078: “**Mediocre companies rarely display the relentless culture of discipline—disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and who take disciplined action—that we find in truly great companies. A culture of discipline is not a principle of business; it is a principle of greatness.” (Collins, 2005, p. 1.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The Christian faith is about discipline. We seek to focus people as disciples to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet we do so in such undisciplined ways. Congregations can be great when disciplined people take disciplined action to fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 079: “**We need a new language. The critical distinction is not between business and social, but between great and good. We need to reject the naïve imposition of the ‘language of business’ on social sectors, and instead jointly embrace a *language of greatness*.” (Collins, 2005, p. 2.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Mediocre congregations are only seeking to be successful. Better congregations add to that being significant. The best, greatest, thriving congregations are successful, significant, and fully surrendered to God’s leadership.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 080: “**In business, money is both an input (a resource for achieving greatness) *and* an output (a measure of greatness). In the social sectors, money is *only* an input, and not a measure of greatness.” (Collins, 2005, p. 5.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “In congregations, the growth and development of the congregation is an input. Output is the significance, scope, and impact, capacity building, and sustainability of a Christ-like culture and ministry that reflects a movement toward fully surrendering to God’s leadership.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 081: “**A great organization is one that delivers superior performance and makes a distinctive impact over a long period of time.” (Collins, 2005, p. 5.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “A great congregation is one where the community context it serves and/or the people groups it serves are transformed by the Gospel and sustain and continually progress in their spiritual and strategic journey.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 082: “**The basic idea is still the same: separate inputs from outputs, and hold yourself accountable for progress in outputs, *even if those outputs defy measurement*.” (Collins, 2005, p. 5.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Church growth is not the point. Kingdom growth that is empowered and increases geometrically because of the input of growth is the point. The congregational tree must bear fruit.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 083:** “It doesn’t really matter whether you can quantify your results. What matters is that you rigorously assemble *evidence*—quantitative or qualitative—to track your progress. If the evidence is primarily qualitative, think like a trial lawyer assembling the combined body of evidence. If the evidence is primarily quantitative, then think of yourself as a laboratory scientist assembling and assessing the data.” (Collins, 2005, p. 7.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “While it is difficult to measure many things in congregations – such as spiritual formation – it is still possible to develop a benchmark of characteristics and use multiple lens to observe if progress is being made by asking same or similar qualitative questions over a period of time. It is easy to measure output – enrollment, attendance, and completion of a study. It is more difficult to measure impact – is a person functioning with greater spiritual maturity in their lives. (George Bullard)

**Insight 084:** “No matter how much you have achieved, you will always be merely good relative to what you can become. Greatness is an inherently dynamic process, not an and point.” (Collins, 2005, p. 9.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “No congregation even arrives. The journey is never completed. Congregations may be vital, vibrant, or thriving for a season, but then what it means to be vital, vibrant, and thriving has move forward and left them behind. Vitality, vibrancy, and thriving are dynamic factors.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 085:** “Social sector leaders are not less decisive than business leaders as a general rule; they only appear that way to those who fail to grasp the complex governance and diffuse power structures common to social sectors.” (Collins, 2005, p. 10.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations deal more with right-brained issues of feelings, emotion, and transformational change. Businesses deal more with left-brained issues of logic, structure, and transactional change. At times congregations would do well to act more like businesses, and businesses more like the social sector.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 086:** “There are two types of leadership skill: executive and legislative. In executive leadership, the individual leader has enough concentrated power to simply make the right decisions. In legislative leadership, on the other hand, no individual leader—not even the nominal chief executive—has enough structural power to make the most important decision by himself or herself.” (Collins, 2005, pp. 11-12.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “More often than not, in congregations, the pastor primarily has legislative leadership and must amass spiritual and emotional support for important decisions. Exceptions exist when the pastor is the founding pastor, is a long-tenured pastor who has been able to remain respected as a leader, when the congregational structure is changed to provide the pastor with more executive leadership, and—unfortunately—when the people do not care.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 087:** “Legislative leadership relies more on persuasion, political currency, and shared interests to create the conditions for the right decision to happen. And it is precisely this legislative dynamic that makes Level 5 leadership particularly important in the social sectors.” (Collins, 2005, p. 11.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Preaching is large group persuasion. Therefore, pastors have somewhat of an advantage in developing more permission in a legislative decision environment. One-on-one pastor interactions positively contribute. Shared interests are also present. What is often missing for pastors in the political know-how to bring a needed decision to a great conclusion without offended some portion of their congregation. This is particularly true when the congregation is not captivated by God’s empowering vision.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 088:**  Concerning Level 5 leadership, it “is not about being ‘soft’ or ‘nice’ or purely ‘inclusive’ or ‘consensus-building.’ The whole point of Level 5 is to make sure the *right* decisions happen—no matter how difficult or painful—for the long-term greatness of the institution and the achievement of its mission, independent of consensus or popularity.” (Collins, 2005, p. 11.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Pastors can have authority without be authoritarian. They have authority in at least two ways. One is the perception of the role of pastor as one called by God to this role gives them role and position power. The other is that they have expressed positive, proactive leadership and have gained the respect of followers. Both of these types of authority can be lost by the inadequate and careless expression of leadership. It is then that some pastors press harder and become authoritarian.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 089:**  Level 5 executive leadership “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.” Level five leaders have gained a synergy of being effective, competent, contributing, and capable. (Collins, 2005, p. 12.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Leadership greatness is not that which comes from reading a book, taking a course, being part of a network of leaders, or having a successful congregation or ministry. Leadership greatness emerges over years of spiritual development, skillful practice, ministry experience, reflection on learned principles, and a series of revelations about what it really takes to be characterized by leadership greatness.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 090:**  “The best leaders of the future—in social sectors *and* business—will not be purely executive or legislative; they will have a knack for knowing when to play their executive chips, and when not to.” (Collins, 2005, p. 12.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Great leaders do not have one game plan for leadership that they apply to every congregational situation and context. They do not have only one style of leadership. They are able to innovate and be agile depending on what the situation, context, and seasons a congregation’s life requires for the best ministry impact.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 091:**  “*True leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to*. If people follow you because they have no choice, then you are not leading.” (Collins, 2005, p. 13.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Followership is not something congregational leaders can demand. They must earn followership as they point people to the principles of the Christian faith, show how they are examples of these principles, and help people with positive spiritual passion develop a practice of ministry consistent with these principles.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 092:**  “Business executives don’t have the same concentration of pure executive power they once enjoyed. Level 5 leadership combined with legislative skill will become even more important to the next generation of business executives, and they will do well to learn from the social sectors.” (Collins, 2005, p. 13.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “During the past half-century people in roles of leadership have been questioned and doubted to a significant degree. Demand leadership is not feasible in many situations. The art of leadership is a stronger characteristic of great leaders than is the science of leadership. Congregations – at their beast – are a great laboratory for the art of leadership and can also mentor the business and political world about great leadership.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 093:**  “Do whatever you can to get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people into the right seats.” “Greatness flows first and foremost from having the right people in the key seats, not the other way around.” (Collins, 2005, p. 14.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Too often congregations go after a willing person who will show up, or they have people who have been in a role for a long time for which they are no longer qualified if they ever were, and the congregation does not have a way to get the best people in the best roles, no imagination for how to do so, and perhaps not motivation to do so.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 094:**  “In the social sectors, where getting the wrong people off the bus can be more difficult than in a business, early assessment mechanisms turn out to be more important than hiring mechanisms. There is no perfect interviewing technique, no ideal hiring method, even the best executives make hiring mistakes. You can only know for certain about a person by working with that person.” (Collins, 2005, p. 15.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Hiring the best staff can at times be even more difficult in congregations than getting the right layperson into the right seat on the congregational journey bus. Full-time staff who are hired and their family relocated to the church field are extremely difficult to get rid of after about 120 days of experience in developing a support group within the congregation. Refocusing their role—changing their seat—on the journey bus may be a greater possibility.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 095:**  “Business executives can more easily fire people and—equally important—they can use money to buy talent. Most social sector leaders, on the other hand, must rely on people underpaid relative to the private sector or, in the case of volunteers, paid not at all.” (Collins, 2005, p. 15.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The advantages a congregation has over the business sector in hired staff are the sense of spiritual call for the staff person, and the spiritual discernment process of the congregational leadership. Both advantages should be used, but even then, you may not have the right person on the congregational journey bus in the right seat.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 096:**  “The great companies . . . focused on getting and hanging on to the right people in the first place—those who are productively neurotic, those who are self-motivated and self-disciplined, those who wake up every day, compulsively driven to do the best they can because it is simply in their DNA.” (Collins, 2005, p. 15.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “A place where congregations can compete with the business world in hiring people or placing layperson has to do with passion. People with positive, spiritual passion about the future of the Church and your congregation to which God is calling them—as long as they do not have blinders on and cannot look to the left or the right for innovation—may make great hires or volunteers if they are teachable.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 097:**  “The more selective the process, the more attractive a position becomes—even if volunteer or low pay.” “The social sectors have one compelling advantage: desperate craving for meaning in our lives.” “The number-one resource for a great social sector organization is having enough of the right people willing to commit themselves to mission.” (Collins, 2005, pp. 16-17.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Yes, mission is a competitive advantage in congregations. If people believe deeply enough in the mission, vision, and core values of a congregation, then they will commit themselves to it as long as the leaders of the congregation having equally as a deep a commitment to the mission, vision, and core values.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 098:**  “Time and talent can often compensate for lack of money, but money cannot ever compensate for lack of the right people.” (Collins, 2005, p. 17.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Never call to staff or place in a volunteer position someone who is not the right person who you have placed in the right seat on the bus. If you do, you will work constantly to change what seat they are in on the congregation’s journey bus, or you will be looking for their baggage stored underneath the bus and throw it and them off at the next stop. Doing this will also create a bad reputation for your congregation and may make the next staff hire or volunteer placement more difficult.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 099:**  It is important to understand Collins’ Hedgehog Concept and its application to the social sector. The Hedgehog Concept for the social sector addresses (1) what you are deeply passionate about, (2) what you can be the best in the world at, and (3) how well you develop sustainable resources and develop them with superior performance related to your mission. (Collins, 2005, pp. 17-18.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Discipline around the Hedgehog Concept is essential for congregations. They must be deeply passionate about their eternal mission, they must seek to be the very best they can at a few things that fulfill that mission, and they must develop or broker and sustain great, superior resources for their congregational participants.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 100:** “The critical step in the Hedgehog Concept is to determine how best to connect all three circles, so that they reinforce each other. You must be able to answer the question, ‘How does focusing on what we do best tie directly to our resource engine, and how does our resource engine directly reinforce what we can do best?’ And you must be right.” (Collins, 2005, p. 22.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “This is why aligning passion, best, and resources with mission, vison, and core values is so vitally important—and non-negotiable for congregations. Having a few great programs, ministries, and activities is no substitute for focusing them all around a spiritual strategic journey.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 101:** “A great social sector organization must have the discipline to say, ‘No thank you’ to resources that drive it away from the middle of its three circles. Those who have the discipline to attract and channel resources directed solely at their Hedgehog Concept, and to reject resources that drive them away from the center of their three circles, will be of greater service to the world.” (Collins, 2005, p. 25.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Discipline and disciple. Two words with the same core meaning. Leaders who want to be disciples – followers of Jesus – must have personal discipline. It is not a leap—but is something ignored or forgotten—that when leading a congregation that same discipline of a disciple must be practiced.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 102:** “This is the power of the flywheel. Success breeds support and commitment, which breeds even greater success, which breeds more support and commitment—round and around the flywheel goes. People like to support winners!” (Collins, 2005, p. 24.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “There is nothing wrong with congregations being successful, as long as this is not their only goal. If they also want to be significant in God’s Kingdom, this is better. If they willingly surrender all they are and have to God, then they are the best.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 103:** “Social sector funding often favors 'time telling' focusing on a specific program or restricted gift, often the brainchild of a charismatic visionary leader. But building a great organization requires a shift to 'clock building"--shaping a strong, self-sustaining organization that can prosper beyond any single programmatic idea or visionary leader" (Collins, 2005, pp. 24-25)

*Implications for Congregations:* "Congregations should focus on any funding beyond a basic financial discipleship commitment to a tithe on funds to fulfill the overall vision of the congregation which is compatible with their mission and core values. There are short-term exceptions to this rule that would relate to unexpected open doors of opportunity and crisis in their community context where for a while promoting contributions that fund and provide resources for an obvious need may have validity. Money will follow the information flow. So, what are you asking your congregation to support?" (George Bullard)

**Insight 104:** "If an institution has a focused Hedgehog Concept and a disciplined organization that delivers exceptional results, the best thing supporters can do is to give resources that enable the institution's leaders to do their work the best way they know how." (Collins, 2005, p. 25)

*Implications for Congregations:* “When people want to designate money in a congregation to a specific cause, or when leaders want to raise money for a short-term tactic rather than a long-term strategy, it communicates the need to fund fixes rather than solutions. If in strategy areas congregations want to keep the main thing the main thing, then the same ought to apply to their funding strategies.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 105:** "Enduring great institutions practice the principle of Preserve the Core and Stimulate Progress, separating core values and fundamental purpose (which should never change) from mere operating practices, cultural norms and business strategies (which endlessly adapt to a changing world)." (Collins, 2005, p. 26)

*Implications for Congregations:* “In congregations it is of utmost importance to continuously renew the mission and core values while seeking to fulfill their current understanding of God's spiritual and strategic direction. Strategies and tactics need to reflect this core and empower God's future for the congregation, rather than driving the direction of the congregation.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 106:** "Social sector leaders pride themselves in ‘doing good’ for the world, but to be of maximum service requires a ferocious focus on doing good only if it fits with your Hedgehog Concept. To do the most good requires saying “no” to pressures to stray, and the discipline to stop doing what does not fit." (Collins, 2005, p. 27)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Focus is so important. In a helping ministry such as a congregation, the needs of people and communities are endless. Effective congregations, however, figure out what they are called of God, spiritually gifted, and have a passion to do and focus there. This type of focus will typically make more Kingdom progress than an unfocused approach.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 107:** "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it tunes out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline." (Collins, 2005, p. 31)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Great congregations do not just happen. Yes, God’s empowerment often leads a congregation to be greater than it would be otherwise – if the congregational leaders are listening closely to the voice of God. More often great congregations result from intentional action to fulfill God’s empowering vision for the congregation, rather than just churning out new and renewed programs each year.” (George Bullard)

**Jim Collins. *Turning the Flywheel: Why Some Companies Building Momentum . . . And Others Don’t*. New York: Harper Collins, 2019.**

**(Purchase on Amazon at** [**https://amzn.to/2NJDkmO**](https://amzn.to/2NJDkmO)**)**

**Insight 108:** “In creating a good-to-great transformation, there’s no single defining action, no grand program, no single killer innovation, so solitary lucky break, no miracle moment. Rather, it feels like turning a giant, heavy flywheel.” (Collins, 2019, p.1.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Again, for congregations, there is no silver bullet. There may be moments of spiritual inspiration that change the direction and focus. Yet it is still about difficult, consistent, dedicated, inspired, visionary, wise, and consistent ministry effort. It is not about a season of one year where things go well following a time of revival or spiritual awakening. It is about intentional action by a core of dedicated Christian disciples. It is working out your long-term salvation as a congregation with fear and trembling.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 109:** “The greatest danger in business and life lies not in outright failure but in achieving success without understanding why you were successful in the first place.” (Collins, 2019, p. 5.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations need self-awareness and reflection about their spiritual and strategic journey. Due to the movement of God's Holy Spirit, who does wonderful things in congregations that cannot at first be seen, it is essential to have discernment not only on what's next, but also what just happened. Additionally, congregations need cultural awareness about contextual dynamics that impact their congregation, how it impacted them, and what they need to learn from it.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 110:** “One of the biggest, and most common, strategic mistakes lies in failing to aggressively and persistently make the most of victories.” (Collins, 2019, p. 6.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations often fail to appropriately celebrate and communicate victories that it achieves through spiritual and strategic efforts, and through open doors and breakthroughs with which God blesses them. Partially this is because of the weekly agendas it must prepare for causes them to keep thinking about what's next. The tyranny of the urgent is a congregation's enemy in making consistent progress.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 111:** “If you conceive of your flywheel in the right way--and if you continually renew and extend the flywheel--it can be remarkably durable, perhaps even capable of carrying your organization through a major strategic inflection point or turbulent disruption.” (Collins, 2019, p. 6.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “If a congregation's eternal mission and empowering vision are clear and deeply and broadly owned throughout the congregation, and if an effective strategy and set of tactics that align with that mission and vision are proactively being carried out, then disruptive change in the cultural and world events will not sidetrack a congregation. The strategy and tactics might need some creative innovation, but in all except the most extreme cases the congregation will continue moving forward.” (George Bullard)

**Insight 112:** “For a truly great company, the Big Thing is never any specific line of business or product or idea or invention. The Big Thing is your underlying flywheel architecture, properly conceived. If you get your flywheel right, it can guide and drive momentum (with renewal and extensions) for at least a decade, and likely much longer.” (Collins, 2019, p. 8.)

*Implications for Congregations*: “The underlying eternal mission, everlasting purpose, enduring core values, and empowering vision, and the strategic and tactical actions that align with these, are the core DNA or operating system of a congregation. High impact events and short-term projects should always renew the core and extend the ministry of the congregation, not become, or replace the core Flywheel of the congregation. God may use events and projects to enhance your mission, but not to replace your mission." (George Bullard)

**Insight 113:** “A flywheel need not be entirely unique. Two success organizations can have similar flywheels. What matters most is how well you understand your flywheel and how well you execute on each component over a long series of iterations.” (Collins, 2019, p. 11.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Many principles in some thriving congregations fit in many other congregations seeking to thrive. Some same or similar strategies work in many congregations. The key is not to just 'plug and play' someone else's strategy into your congregation. The key is to understand what made that strategy work for someone else, how to contextualize it for the unique situation of your congregation and community context, to know when it is and is not working for you, and to understand the adjustments you need to make along the way or when to 'pull the plug' because it is not working." (George Bullard)

**Insight 114:** “Leaders who create pockets of greatness at the unit level of their organization . . . don't sit around hoping for perfection from the organization or system around them.” (Collins, 2019, p. 15.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Some congregations are known for specific programs, ministries, and ongoing activities which approach, achieve, or sustain greatness. This can take place in congregations who overall are not all that great. But it can also become a theme or specialty for the congregation that creates their image or brand in their community context. At the same time, the overall congregation may allude greatness." (George Bullard)

**Insight 115:** “Once you get the flywheel right, the question becomes, what do we need to do better to accelerate momentum? The very nature of a flywheel--that it depends upon getting the sequence right and that every component depends on all the other components--means that you simply cannot falter on any primary component and sustain momentum.” (Collins, 2019, p. 17.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The systems of your congregation are integrative. The excellent functioning of one aspect of your systems also depends on the excellent functioning of other aspects. Take the disciplemaking process as an example. The aspects of the systems that help people grow and mature as disciples are integrated as a process when they are functioning at their best. They are not just a collection of programs and events for which people sign up. They function in a flywheel manner that provides a clear pathway to mature discipleship." (George Bullard)

**Insight 116:** “The flywheel, when properly conceived and executed, creates both continuity and change. On the one hand, you need to stay with a flywheel long enough to get its full compounding effect. On the other hand, to keep the flywheel spinning, you need to continually renew, and improve each and every component.” (Collins, 2019, p. 18.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Simultaneous continuity and change is an important concept for congregations to grasp and to put into practice. The gospel message is a core element of the continuity of congregations. It is the substance. The strategy and structure of congregations mirror the continuous incremental innovation that keeps its organizational and strategic flywheel spinning. Regular transition and change in the style and services of congregations provide continual excitement and inspiration in congregations that keep people connected." (George Bullard)

**Insight 117:** “There are two possible explanations for a stalled or stuck flywheel. Possible explanation #1: The underlying flywheel is just fine, but you're failing to innovate and execute brilliantly on every single component; the flywheel needs to be reinvigorated. Possible explanation #2: The underlying flywheel no longer fits reality and must be changed in some significant way. It's imperative that you make the right diagnosis.” (Collins, 2019, p. 20.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “Congregations are on a never-ending journey toward God's full Kingdom potential for them. They can never stop innovating or stop executing with excellence. When they do, their flywheel slows down and may stop. Congregations must also modulate their strategy and tactics according to the transitions and changes in their community or people group context. Periodically their flywheel can lose relevance with their context. When this happens, they must renew their contextual understandings and adjust their strategy and tactics." (George Bullard)

**Insight 118:** “Rarely does a great flywheel stall because it's run of potential or is fundamentally broken. More often, momentum stalls due to either poor executive and/or failure to renew and extend within a fundamentally sound flywheel architecture. It is the topic of extending the flywheel that we now turn.” (Collins, 2019, p. 21.)

*Implications for Congregations:* “The strategy and systems of congregations are dynamic, flexible, relational, and organic at their best. These great strengths can also be great weaknesses. To keep the congregational flywheel moving takes consistent, excellent execution in spite of efforts that arise to divert the congregation from fulfilling its main mission and vision. Even pastors, staff, and lay leaders tire of the regular, weekly execution of programs, ministries, and activities. This weariness negatively impacts the health and strength of the congregation. A strategy must be in place to support the patterns and practices of leadership, and to provide room for breathing and respite so that the flywheel might keep turning with increasing capacity." (George Bullard)