Learning by benchmarking to both highly accomplished people and to successful organizations is easily one of the most foundational ways to learn best practices for superior results. And, you know what? Every person with ambitious goals seems to inherently glean this early on when it comes to closely tracking and emulating world-class athletes and musicians and organizational leaders. That truism accounts for the countless number of biographies of achievers lining the shelves of bookstores and libraries. And all that is no different from an organizational perspective, too—yeah, it's about trying to extract keys to sustainable success. So it goes: aspiring pastors tend to observe effective churches, aspiring CEOs research top businesses, aspiring politicians study national and world leaders.

As an illustration, Winston Churchill was the world-famous Prime Minister of the British Empire, personally straddling the first seven decades of the 20th century—but he was also a highly prolific writer, credited as publishing over 40 books, 1,000 articles and countless speeches, many millions of words in total. Because he was a man who illuminated and steered key aspects of Britain's politics for decades, people have consistently wanted to know what his thinking was…his priorities were…his views of history guiding his actions. But beyond his words, an estimated 1,200 books have been written *about* Churchill from virtually every angle possible, the publishing dates spanning over a century from 1905 until today. And that's only those delivered in the English language—no telling the number of books translated to other languages.

Well, it's clear that a whole lot of people can't get enough information about Winston Churchill…even today, six decades after he died. There are a number of reasons why that is—you know, like his being a central figure in World War II…a widely certified savior-like figure of a beleaguered England mired in the seemingly hopeless depths of that war…a superb, nearly unparalleled communicator of the written and spoken word…an almost impossibly entertaining humorist, and that humor often at the expense of others.

But one factor seems to weave itself and even loom through all these themes and more—Churchill exhibited both how to do things very, very well as well as how to do things very badly, sometimes in the extreme. For example, during a vital time in World War I, Churchill forcefully advocated what was known as the Gallipoli campaign when he was in charge as First Lord of the Admiralty for Britain—and that campaign was considered perhaps to be the biggest disaster for the Allies during that war. You see, Winston was a very big personality and he could fail as big as he could succeed.

So, by the early 1930s, Churchill was widely considered washed up, his career deemed dead by most all of the elite in Britain. But Churchill was undaunted, he built an unofficial shadow government gathering intelligence about Hitler and Germany and British unpreparedness, both in its will and its munitions. For Churchill, the period of the 1930s is what political biographers call *the wilderness years*, where a politician is considered dead and gone for all political purposes. But in Winston's case, that calculation didn't factor in Hitler's intentions and aggression and Britain's political unwillingness to address both.

One of Churchill's key biographers was William Manchester, and his second large volume in his *Last Lion* series about Churchill was titled "Alone." Yes, Winston was politically alone, wallowing in public humiliation and indifference even while he worked in the midst of that to be ready to lead. And that's exactly what happened. When Hitler succeeded viciously on the Continent of Europe, Churchill was the only clear choice for Britain's Prime Minister. Yes, because of his failure, his wilderness years, his continuing dogged preparation, and his vigorous mindset, Churchill was ready to take the reins of the largest geographic empire in world history. And then the rest created new history: Britain and its allies won World War II and Churchill was the central figure rallying it to amazing success.

But many who fruitfully study Churchill see his great victories but also his dramatic failures—in politics, in war, in human relations, and in politics. You see, after leading England to its great victory, voters booted Winston out of high office in 1944—but, later, there he was again, elected once more as Prime Minister!

Look, astute studiers who want to deliver great results pursue intentional learning from folks doing badly, even when those very folks also may have also had great successes. This is one reason why so many pursue

learning about Winston Churchill—he instructively failed as greatly in key areas as he succeeded in others. Nevertheless, one of Churchill's most unremarked-upon accomplishments is really key to understanding his greatness. Even while an unapologetic advocate for Britain and its empire, Churchill knew one crucial fact when he took office. Britain's days as an empire were already numbered and the vital key to winning the war was to recruit President Franklin Roosevelt and the United States as England's full-blown ally. Yeah, this fact was truly clear: Britain could not possibly defeat Germany alone. And Churchill literally had no doubt that the United States could and would be the key to defeating Germany and Japan.

In this way, Churchill knew he was clearly being forced into passing the baton of world leadership of free nations to a country better equipped and ultimately willing to do the key job set before it: serving freedom-loving peoples the world over against vicious adversaries. And you know what? Churchill was still willing to fulfill Britain's new junior role, recognizing its inadequacy and its primary leadership being rendered obsolete. Fact is, Churchill was always perceptive in re-framing his understanding of history in the midst of currently unfolding events, so he naturally heralded the opportunity to do that. So…he clearly showed his affection for America and its key position as a beacon of freedom and leader in world affairs.

Now here's a quite poignant and amazing type of parallel. Yes, in his time, Churchill stood out as central in the midst of many worldly kingdoms with his beckoning and heralding the coming of the U.S.'s world leadership. And that was not unlike John the Baptist's heralding, prophetic role in a far greater, truly-worldwide enterprise. And that was Christ coming to save the world by His sacrifice on the Cross.

Yeah, the United States largely stayed publicly aloof until a certain fullness of time for its full enjoining World War II, coming at a time with the continent of Europe already pretty much laying prostrate under the boot of Germany—and Britain itself deeply threatened by the same. Likewise, Jesus came in the *true* fullness of time, ultimately coming to the river Jordan, being baptized by John the Baptist, the herald of the new order. Yes, the New Covenant that was indeed making the Old Covenant obsolete. …But you know what? For centuries, many churchgoers haven't believed the New Covenant is better than the Old!

The other day in a college class, I mentioned the often-neglected portion in the book of Hebrews written to the Jews, namely Hebrews 8, specifically verses 6-7, 13 (ESV): "But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second…In speaking of a new covenant, [Christ] makes the first one obsolete." A student objected to the sense of this, citing 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which says: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." My response to that student's comment was this…

The Old Testament is truly profitable, with one key reason being *because it plainly documents the constant failures of humanity and the inadequacy of the Old Covenant as compared to the New*, both institutional for Israel and in numerous examples of individuals. Even so, it lifts up those individuals revealing the New Covenant of faith and grace to come—yeah, in the personages of folks like Noah and Abraham!

The problem is that many folks give a sort of equal weight to the law and God's grace, when, in fact, the Cross alone has positioned believers such that they are "not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14) And that positioning has been misinterpreted by many since the earliest days of the church.

Look, as Churchill recognized the inadequacy of a British-led political order and his leadership alone, he then facilitated and heralded the coming of the U.S. as the necessary, better option. And John the Baptist was appointed to herald Jesus as the clearly better option to the Old Covenant. Hey, in our lives, we can and should learn from folks doing badly. And we can and should recognize the inadequacy of the Old Covenant and Mosaic Law to solve the sin problem for humanity—after all, that's a very key purpose of why God provided the Old Testament narrative to us! So this is the privilege and opportunity of believers: to intentionally learn both from folks doing badly and the inadequacy of lesser solutions. *Now that's huge!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you view the New Covenant as a better covenant, and that "Christ makes the first one obsolete"…as per Hebrews 8? Discuss.

2. Why do so many Christians and churches try to treat the New Covenant as pretty much equal to the Old Covenant instead of being handled as "better," as per Hebrews 8? Discuss.

3. Do you intentionally learn from folks doing badly, Biblically and vocationally? Give examples.