

Book: *The Centurion Principles: Battlefield Lessons from Frontline Leaders*

Author: Col Jeff O'Leary (Ret)

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Book Review:

Looking for a great leadership, but don't have a lot of time to read it? Well, *The Centurion Principles: Battlefield Lessons from Frontline Leaders* is the book for you. COL (Ret-USA) Jeff O'Leary has followed his *New York Times* Best Seller, *America Out of the Ashes*, with a well-written and concise leadership text. *Centurion* is unfortunately under the category of Christian Living-Leadership at most mall or online books stores. In the same vein as John Maxwell's leadership manuscripts, O'Leary points his readers towards the values required for today's centurions.

Against a backdrop of latest news reports about scandals in every facets of business, *Centurion* masterfully describes the principles necessary for the Roman Centurion. O'Leary takes several leaders from history to emphasize these principles. Although each of these leaders may hold more than one characteristic of a Centurion (and maybe some "not-so-Centurion" characteristics), only one trait is used to drive the point home. With the exception of George McClellan, only positive examples of centurion principles are highlighted. Yes, even 120 years after his death, poor George is still taking a beating.

Below is a list of the leaders and the principles they epitomize (paraphrased)

- Hannibal – Creativity
- Scipio Africanus – Learning from Failure
- Alexander the Great – Unify Your People
- Joan of Arc – Commitment
- George Washington – Pureness of Motives
- Andrew Jackson – Persistence
- George McClellan – Decisiveness
- Robert E. Lee – Boldness
- Ulysses S. Grant – Take Care of Your Subordinates
- Abraham Lincoln – Know Your People

Of all the great examples in *Centurion*, I have singled out a few as favorites. First, I thought the lessons of Alexander the Great are timeless and very appropriate to today. As Alexander conquered city after city, he enlisted local leaders to hold prominent positions in the new government. No greater example of following Alexander's example was the post-WWII government installed in Japan by Douglas McArthur that kept the Japanese Parliament intact. Most recently, efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq to restore local governments mirror this model.

Although a huge Civil War follower, my favorite Centurion is not Lee, Grant, or Lincoln. O'Leary captured my attention with his depiction of Joan of Arc. Joan of Arc is rarely listed as a great leader in history. This is due in part to male-domination of early opportunities for leadership positions. You can't walk away from this story without an appreciation for her commitment to what she saw as doing the greater good. Additionally, the author's extraordinary detail of her trial is no small feat. Col O'Leary searched the world for a rare copy of the manuscript which detailed her trial.

The Centurion Principles may not appeal to all readers. First, you can't be sensitive to religious references. O'Leary makes no attempt to hide his beliefs, even blocking off paragraphs entitled "A Pause for a Spiritual Reflection." Second, the text holds more appeal if you are a history buff. Without this attraction, a reader may not truly appreciate the impact of these centurions. Finally, in an effort to provide a concise and direct correlation of the centurion to the principle, O'Leary provides just a few examples to support his thesis.

If none of these points dissuade you, I would highly recommend that *The Centurion Principles: Battlefield Lessons from Front Line Leaders* be added to your leadership library. In fact, after reading this book, I am adding *America Out of the Ashes* to my Christmas wish list.

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