

# CONNECTIONS

*You teach what you know,  
but you reproduce what you are.<sup>1</sup>*

HOWARD HENDRICKS

Howard G. Hendricks is considered to be one of the most significant leaders of evangelical Christianity of his generation. In this book, we'll hear from people who knew him personally and from those whose lives and ministries were impacted by him as a professor, a prolific author, a speaker, and a servant on numerous boards. "I love to teach; I *live* to teach . . ." Howard said at the end of his career at Dallas Theological Seminary. "What has encouraged me more is the large number of guys teaching elsewhere who are the product of what I've built into here."<sup>2</sup>

We'll explore his life and legacy and learn how he is indeed worthy of being described as an influential mentor.

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1. Quote attributed to Howard Hendricks by one of his students, Janet Renner Loyd, "Thinking of Spiritual Fathers," A Branch in the Vine (blog), June 13, 2013, <https://www.abranchinthevine.com/blog/thinking-of-spiritual-fathers>.
  2. "Dr. Howard Hendricks, A 'Prof' Like No Other," Dallas Theological Seminary, November 16, 2010, <https://www.dts.edu/howard-hendricks-tribute/>.

## A Picture Emerges

Many of us enjoyed the children's activity of connecting the dots, joining parts to complete a whole image. My own connection to this project came when Howard's former colleague Gene Getz suggested I write a biography about him.<sup>3</sup> Though I felt honored, that led to the next question: *How does one write about a person who did not want a traditional biography written about him?* Because Howard's life connected with and influenced so many Christian leaders who reflected his passion for ministry, this quandary led to an opportunity. Interviewing some of the many people Howard impacted has led to a series of dots that, when joined, reveal a picture of Howard and his Christlike leadership. So let me stress that this book is not a biography of Howard Hendricks' life. Instead, I invite you to join me in a series of conversations with many leaders who have spoken about the influence of Howard Hendricks on their lives.

The project in your hand is simply a book of influence. Most of the ministry leaders in this book, when approached about this project, immediately jumped at the chance to participate, and answered with an enthusiastic *yes!*

But the number of those who have already been influenced by Howard Hendricks is perhaps meager when compared to those who could still benefit from his influence.

Howard understood his role to connect people through understanding God's Word to the lordship and leadership of Christ so that they, too, would do the same for others. One man's commitment to making disciples using his dynamic, God-given personality has inspired others to follow—not in Howard's footsteps but in Christ's. We can do more than appreciate Howard as a unique and influential servant of God: we can learn from his leadership. Howard left us some

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3. Dr. Gene Getz and I had multiple conversations about Howard Hendricks starting in August 2021; he was, in fact, the catalyst for this project.

powerful principles that can connect a few more dots in God’s plan for your life. I pray that these accounts increase the scope and intensity of your own influence on others.

Some Christian influencers flame brightly only for a short time. Like shooting stars whose trajectory is briefly traced in the atmosphere before winking out and hurtling downward, they become indistinguishable from the inky darkness around them. Paul paints the opposite picture in his letter to the Philippians, calling believers to shine like stars in enduring contrast to the worldly gloom of a sinful humanity (see Phil. 2:15). Stars stand out. Howard simply wanted to be another bright dot—a point of light in a grand picture that reveals the influence of Christ in a world that so desperately needs Him. Any Christian who wants to emulate enduring leadership can learn from Howard’s lifelong ministry career.

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### **“Prof” and “Mr. Dallas”**

Everyone has a story, and Howard’s story began in a rather unlikely way for one whom many would later simply call “Prof.” Howard’s road started on April 5, 1924. He was born to parents who some would say weren’t ready for his arrival. Howard said, “My parents separated when I came along. I split the family.” Howard’s main upbringing took place during the Great Depression that began when he was a young child.

The twists and turns of Howard’s story include a decades-long estrangement from his father, George, who wasn’t involved in his upbringing. It was not until years later that they reconnected. Howard, like others raised without involved fathers, knew the deep ache of such an absence. Even so, God’s hand was on Howard. It was his grandmother who played a dominant role in his early years, serving

as his primary caregiver, and was a bridge to bring him to faith in Jesus. Later, through a series of improbable connections, Howard was influenced by Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life and a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. This and other formative relationships helped put Howard on the road to becoming the man God called him to be.

At one point he earned the nickname “Mr. Dallas” because of the breadth of his pursuits and connections in the Dallas area, from teaching at Dallas Theological Seminary to being the chaplain of the Dallas Cowboys. Perhaps it was Howard’s own life experience that gave him the unshakable belief that everyone he encountered had a story of their own. He loved being around people. Jeanne Hendricks remembers, “As his wife, there were times that it was hard to keep up with him.” She shares that Howard would walk into parties and want to know everyone. This insatiable curiosity to know people may help explain how he influenced so many people who in turn became influencers themselves. We will discover more on that later as some of them share their stories.

### **Jeanne Hendricks Talks about Howard**

Jeanne explains that being married to Howard could be summed up in three words: faithful, focused, and fruitful, and added that living with Howard was like living in the fast lane.<sup>4</sup> He loved being involved in many different things, a symptom of his boundless creative energy and a hint at why his life was so influential. Howard served in many aspects of ministry life—as a minister, professor, author, and even, as mentioned, chaplain of an NFL team.

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4. Jeanne Hendricks was generous with her time. We shared multiple conversations about Howard between 2020 and 2022.

### *Faithful*

Faithfulness often involved sticking to the task in the face of opposition. This man influenced not only countless lives but also several ministries, including his pioneering approach toward Christian education itself. Innovators are not always initially appreciated, and this was true for Howard. When he came to Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), Jeanne explained that many other professors didn't want him there, and some made it a point to openly say so. Howard arrived at DTS as the youngest professor teaching in the Christian Education program; at the time this field wasn't considered to be as important as the theological course offerings. Jeanne admits the snubbing grew so bad that Howard wanted to leave many times, as so few among the faculty accepted him in those early days.

Jeanne remembers one specific instance when, because students were warming up to Howard and rating his class higher than the rest of their classes, a seminary official asked Howard to share with the other professors at their annual retreat why his classes had achieved such high regard. The response from his peers was underwhelming. Those same professors continued to disregard Howard, leaving him disappointed and disillusioned. Even so, Howard remained faithful through it all, bringing his own fresh brand of teaching to the classroom.

One well-known example of this unique teaching style occurred during one of Howard's lectures. Determined to reach a student who wasn't paying attention, Howard walked over to the student and spoke just to him the entire time. He had no problem becoming a spectacle if doing so was effective. A seemingly inexhaustible supply of creative teaching energy flowed from Howard, only increasing when he could not engage each of his students. The students themselves understood this type of thing wasn't unusual, because it flowed from the heart of this man who so desired to reach and influence as many people as he could.

While Howard may not have been able to influence his early colleagues, his nearly sixty years of teaching at DTS transformed the

institution itself. In a sense, Howard's faithfulness was characterized as much by his steady leadership as it was by leaps of faith toward new endeavors. In either case, his example inspires the rest of us toward the title for which he strove, that of a good and faithful servant. That title is not earned by accident; it requires an unrelenting focus on the mission that God calls each of us to. Howard seemed to not let negativity stop him, maybe because he knew that God had called him to carry out His vision and purpose.

### *Focused*

Howard had focus, and a similar focus was required from his spouse, who so loyally stood with him.

I want to pause here for just a moment. I believe there would have been no Howard as we know him without having his strong partner, Jeanne, by his side. A speaker and author herself, Jeanne is also a force to be reckoned with. She not only consistently balanced being a wife and mother but also clearly helped Howard stay focused so that he could be the beloved figure about whom we are reading today.

Jeanne recognized that "Howard knew where he was going." It was this assurance in the knowledge of his future that bubbled over into an insatiable zeal to share the gospel's hope with others. "Howard was hungry in wanting to reach as many people as he could for Jesus," she says. "Howard knew what God wanted him to do, and nobody was going to stop him."

### *Fruitful*

Of course, to stop Howard would require catching up to him. The outworking growth of the gospel in Howard's life consistently found new fruit. The tenured, beloved professor frequently left the safety of the campus for other ministry adventures. He was a trailblazer in his own right, partly due to the unique wiring God had given him and partly due to his unswerving drive to build God's kingdom through various avenues, regardless of whether they had been paved or not.

Because of Howard's entrepreneurial missions spirit, he encountered a wide array of opportunities. With such breathtaking activity, one might wonder whether Howard could catch up to himself. Sometimes he did, just long enough to slow down. These were the moments that revealed Howard's complexity, which reminds us that this great leader was as human as you and I are. Any life given to God can be used to influence many, despite our flaws.

As we have said, Howard struggled with professional connections early on at DTS, and he could have left for other pursuits. If you go to the DTS campus today, though, you will find the Hendricks Center. This building is only one tangible sign of the fruitful legacy he has left. We could simply enumerate his speaking ministry in over eighty countries, his tapes, his service on boards, his books, including the classic *Living by the Book*, and more. Our purpose in this book, however, is to examine the leadership principles he exemplified, from which we can learn as we pursue God's calling on our lives too.

### The Down Side

Perhaps you look at a life like Howard's and assume he had it all together. His mission, you might think, only existed in the overflow of a life that was fully balanced and operating smoothly. That is not the picture I intend to paint, and it is one that I doubt Howard would have wanted painted about himself. Whitewashing anyone we look up to can devolve into an excuse to not follow in their footsteps. If our lives were free of daily struggles just like Howard's life was, we reason, we would be poised for impact like his.

One of the reasons I took on the assignment of working on this book was finding out that Howard had ordinary struggles, one of which was depression. Jeanne explained that for Howard "speaking to thousands of college kids for Campus Crusade" and other events came at a physical and emotional price. "As a young professor," he felt

“totally unworthy of such acclamation.” Howard tackled the down side head-on, through prayer and Scripture.

Another one of Howard’s struggles involved his parenting. It is amazing that, although Howard was widely considered an exemplar of mentoring, he sometimes felt he had a hard time connecting with his own children. “The children’s world was so radically different from that of their father’s,” Jeanne states matter-of-factly. Although all of Howard’s children are serving the Lord in various ways—including one who coauthored several books with him—Jeanne forthrightly explains that Howard found parenting demanding, as do most parents. But “Howie didn’t have a father who was active in his life growing up,” she says, “so parenting was a struggle,” which was likely exacerbated by Howard’s workaholic tendencies. Jeanne recognized this propensity in Howard and saw its impact on parenting.

## The Calling

Our God is the God of baby steps. Undoubtedly, God guides us, His resistant or unfocused children, to slowly discover our calling and do so in a way that leads to increased dependence on Him. Looking back at my life, I realize one of my own small steps happened in the parking lot of my neighborhood bookstore. It is one of the last remaining holdouts among local bookstores, and every time I go there, I feel right at home. This hometown haunt breathes an air of stability and familiarity, even down to the same, trusty parking space I use almost every visit. Once, however, an unexpected find greeted me when I reached my car and glanced down on the pavement. There I spotted a book: *Don’t Fake It . . . Say It with Love* by Howard Hendricks.

I didn’t think much of it at the time, as I tossed the book in my car—apologies to the person who dropped it. Little did I know that I would one day receive a phone call from author and teacher Gene Getz, who would stop in the middle of our conversation and say to me that I needed to write a book about Howard. I love how our

God often works in small, incremental steps, and my prayer is that along our journey together you will either discover your steps or be validated to keep walking in the steps you're taking.

And for the record, I have read *Don't Fake It . . . Say It with Love* a number of times. Though this book was written in 1972, the content about sharing the gospel is as relevant today as it was at that time.

### *Clear Guidance*

Howard discovered his own calling over time, through his own series of steps provided by God. His sense of calling was so strong, Jeanne recalls, that Howard regularly refused to be involved in any endeavor unless he firmly believed God had called him to it. He was asked many times to join different ventures and serve on boards of directors, and I asked Gene how Howard decided who to connect with. It was simple, he told me; it came down to the Spirit's calling and eye contact. This high bar for his own involvement meant Howard could pursue each of these opportunities with unbridled passion and enthusiasm. It is no small wonder that so many gravitated toward him through these pursuits—his energy was contagious.

### *Tireless Sharing*

In Acts 26:24, we hear what Paul was told. "You are out of your mind!" cried Festus. "Your great learning is driving you insane." Paul faced this rebuttal from a nonbeliever, but even some respectable Christians were concerned over Howard's indefatigable sharing of the gospel. Perhaps there was some truth that Howard did not have enough balance in his life, overemphasizing evangelism at the expense of other needs. Calling, by definition, can do that. It demands a sense of focus and emphasis beyond other pursuits. Howard understood his role: he loved God and wanted his students and those around him to know it.

While Jeanne admits she did not always understand God's calling on Howard's life, she clearly believed he was doing God's work and knew part of her own calling was to help him with it. "I took my

cues from him when he was alive,” she explains, adding that their mission “was to love everybody.” The God who loves the whole world impressed that calling upon Howard’s and Jeanne’s hearts.

### *Influencing Those Who Impact*

As I’ve acknowledged, Jeanne was the key figure who helped me discover the importance and urgency of drawing leadership principles from Howard’s life and ministry, and that unlikely connection came through Howard’s friend Gene Getz. It was an odd sensation,

contacting Jeanne for no other reason than that Gene said I should, but Jeanne’s warm response in our conversation was confirmation that the time was right to share about Howard’s reach.

**Howard felt a lasting calling to train ten thousand-plus students to lead the church well.**

It may be surprising to learn that Howard only pastored one church, and that pastorate itself was brief. However, Howard’s calling to help the body of Christ at large did not require years of pastoral experience. He valued the local church and considered the bulk of his mission was to serve as a resource to the church. Howard did not continue to pastor, shares Jeanne, because he felt a lasting calling to train ten thousand-plus students to lead the church well.

Howard had a way of bringing people together, no matter their background. Each of the people we will meet along the way through this book is unique. Howard isn’t the first person to have influenced influencers, but I do think one of the things that makes Howard’s life remarkable is the variety of people that he influenced throughout the body of Christ. Whether by color, gender, political persuasion, or ministry, each of the people on the journey we are about to enter is different, but that simply reflects the variety within the unity of the church, and the opportunity for just one to influence many. He did not merely impact those he directly encountered—he influenced people who went on to make great impact on others.

## Your Part in This Book

I have tried hard to stay focused on what leadership principles we can learn from the people Howard influenced and mentored along the way.

Throughout this book we'll learn about Howard and his life, but again, this book isn't meant to be a biography. It's meant to be a journey as we consider the impact of Howard's life on countless people . . . and what your part is in learning from his example.

You'll have the opportunity to reflect on the principles shared and contemplate how you're doing in your own life, whether you're in vocational ministry, a leader in business, or in a different walk of life altogether. For simplicity's sake, we'll use the word "leader" often, but that needn't be limiting. We're all influencers and leaders in some way or another.

Howard was a man of action in almost every area of his life, pushing himself to make personal changes. In his closing tribute to his DTS family, Howard remarked that there were characteristics that allowed him to not only lead well but to also finish well. May we learn from him on living well and leading well, with the goal of finishing well.