

# *Shackleton:*

A Study in Leadership, Perseverance,  
and Providence.



# Introduction

As one of his men put it, Shackleton was “the greatest leader that ever came on God’s earth, bar none.” After Margot Morrell spent thirteen years of impressive research on Shackleton’s leadership qualities, she wrote: “He is a model of great leadership and, in particular, a master of guidance in crisis.” In 1957, Alfred Lansing, one of Shackleton’s biographers, wrote that “there can be little doubt that Shackleton, in his way, was an extraordinary leader of men.” Apsley Cherry-Garrard, a member of Robert Falcon Scott’s Terra Nova Expedition, wrote: “For a joint scientific and geographical piece of organization, give me Scott; for a Winter Journey, Wilson; for a dash to the Pole and nothing else, Amundsen; and if I am in the devil of a hole and want to get out of



# Introduction

it, give me Shackleton every time.” Geologist J.M. Wordie, one of the crew on the *Endurance*, wrote: “Shackleton possessed in unusual measure the highly poetic imagination which is traditionally associated with a love of exploration. It is well expressed in his writings and in the naming of his ships; still more in his love of poetry. His wonderful memory made it easy for him to have ready a line of verse suitable to almost every occasion. It would generally be from [Robert] Browning, his favorite poet. When combined with great physical strength and with powers of leadership, a poetic nature such as Shackleton’s is the very stuff from which the greatest explorers are made. Shackleton, indeed, possessed the faculty of leadership to a pre-eminent degree.”



# John R.W. Stott at Shackleton's Grave

“At nine o’clock we kept our appointment at the local cemetery, for here that famous Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton is buried. Captain Zander read out a brief tribute to him as the greatest of all seamen and leaders. Then, however strange it may sound in relation to a man long dead, we drank his toast in red wine out of tiny plastic cups – a kind of secular communion service.”

J.R.W. Stott, *People My Teachers*



**Lutheran Church**  
Grytviken, South Georgia





In the dear  
Memory of

ERNEST HENRY  
SHACKLETON  
EXPLORER

Born  
15th Feb. 1874  
Entered Life Etc. 5th Jan. 1922





# Introduction

Every leader has weaknesses, and Shackleton was no exception. However, in this brief series, we will only focus on his leadership, perseverance, and the providence of God. What is of utmost importance can be summarized by physicist Reginald W. James who was with Shackleton on the *Endurance*: “I do not think there is any doubt that we all owe our lives to his leadership and the power of making a loyal and coherent party out of rather diverse elements.”

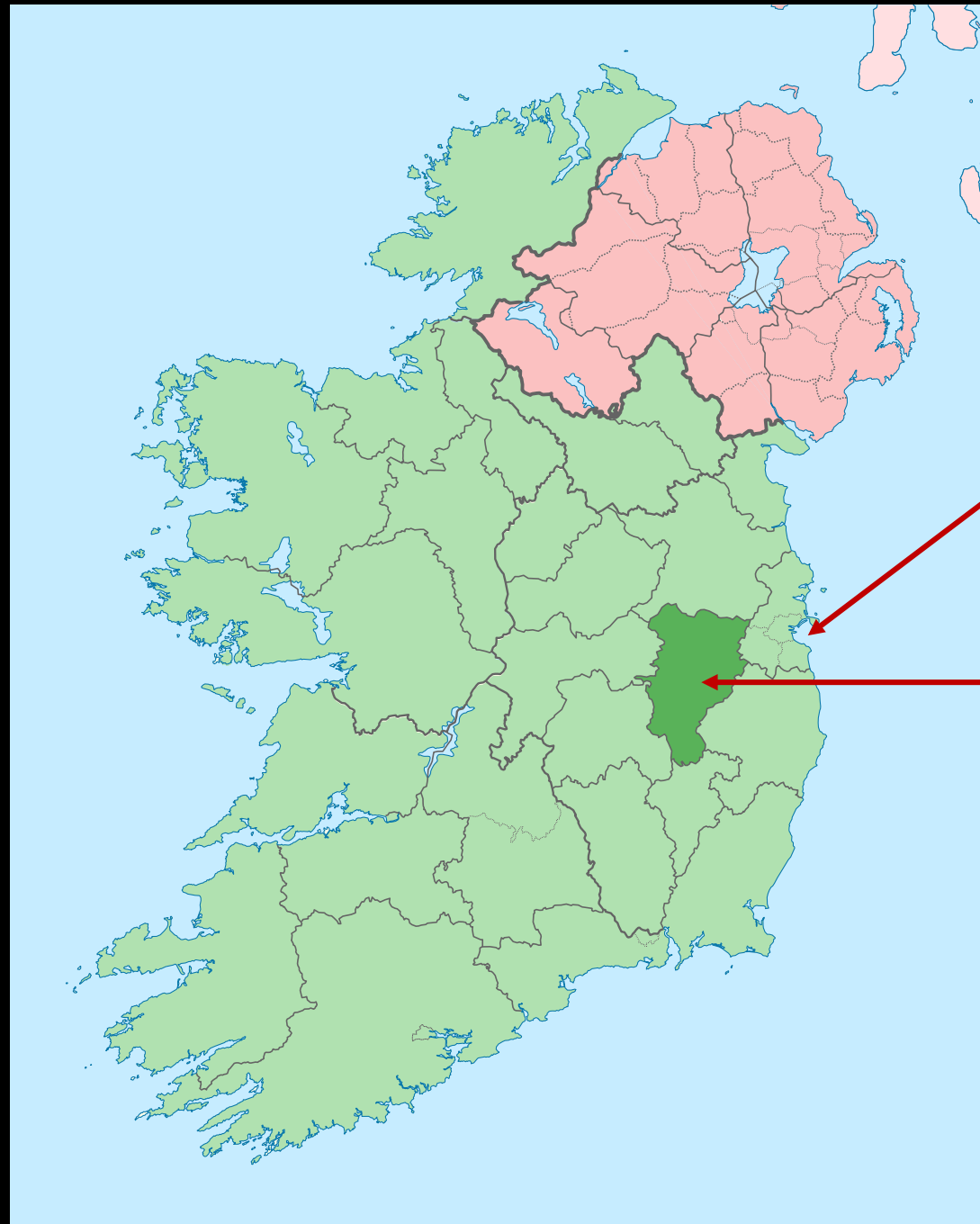
Finally, we must note that there is an important reason – not just an historical or curious one – why we are studying Shackleton’s life:

*You wait. Everyone has an Antarctic.* – Thomas Pynchon, *V.*

# Shackleton's Early Life

- Ernest Henry Shackleton was born at Kilkea House in the barony of Kilkea, near Athy, on February 15, 1874.
- His early life could be divided into three parts: 6 years at Kilkea; 4 years in Dublin; 6 years in Sydenham southeast of London.
- He was the second of ten children, and the first of two boys, born to Henry and Henrietta Shackleton.
- He was schooled by a governess until he was eleven years old.
- In the autumn of 1885, he attended Fir Lodge Preparatory School and, in the summer of 1887, he began his studies at Dulwich College, London.

# Ireland



**1880**

Moved to Dublin when Shackleton was 6; his father studied medicine at Trinity College

**1874**

Kildare County, Birthplace of Ernest Shackleton (about 46 miles southwest of Dublin)

**1884**

Moved to Sydenham in suburban London when Shackleton was 10



# Shackleton's Childhood Home: Kilkea House





Statue of Sir Ernest Shackleton in Athy, Co Kildare, close to where the polar explorer was born in 1874.



# Shackleton's Home in Sydenham, London







# Shackleton and Literature

- Hugh Robert Mill, one of Shackleton's biographers, maintains that "it is almost certain that Ernest could read simple words when he was four years old."
- When he was 7 or 8, he became fond of a book of Arctic travel – C.F. Hall's *Life with the Eskimo*. "The pictures were an inexhaustible attraction, showing as they did ice-floes, towering bergs, snow houses, and the hunting of great beasts on land and sea. His first geography book also had pictures of Arctic and Antarctic bergs" (Mill).
- He was raised in the home of a father and mother who loved poetry and the Bible, and taught Shackleton to love reading as well.



# Shackleton and Literature

- It was “the influence of his inherited qualities and the literary atmosphere of his home, which stimulated his insatiable love of miscellaneous reading.”
- In an interview published in 1909, he is reported as saying, “I have always been interested in Polar Exploration. I can date my first interest in the subject to the time when I was about ten. So great was my interest that I had read almost everything about North and South Polar Explorations.”
- At Dulwich College, London, which he entered at 13, he was second of 18 in History and Literature; in Mathematics, he was third of 25.



# Shackleton and Literature

- Shackleton saw “how vital it was to his success to be someone people liked and wanted to be around – and wanted to give money. But he kept a side to him that yearned to be alone with his books and to enjoy the calm and quiet of wide-open spaces.”
- Authors Morell and Capparell discovered in their research that “Shackleton read broadly to find wisdom and guidance for all life’s journeys.” He taught himself navigation and seamanship, and read a wide array of literature, including Shakespeare, Longfellow, Darwin, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Milton, Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens. He also read a great deal of history in his early voyages.



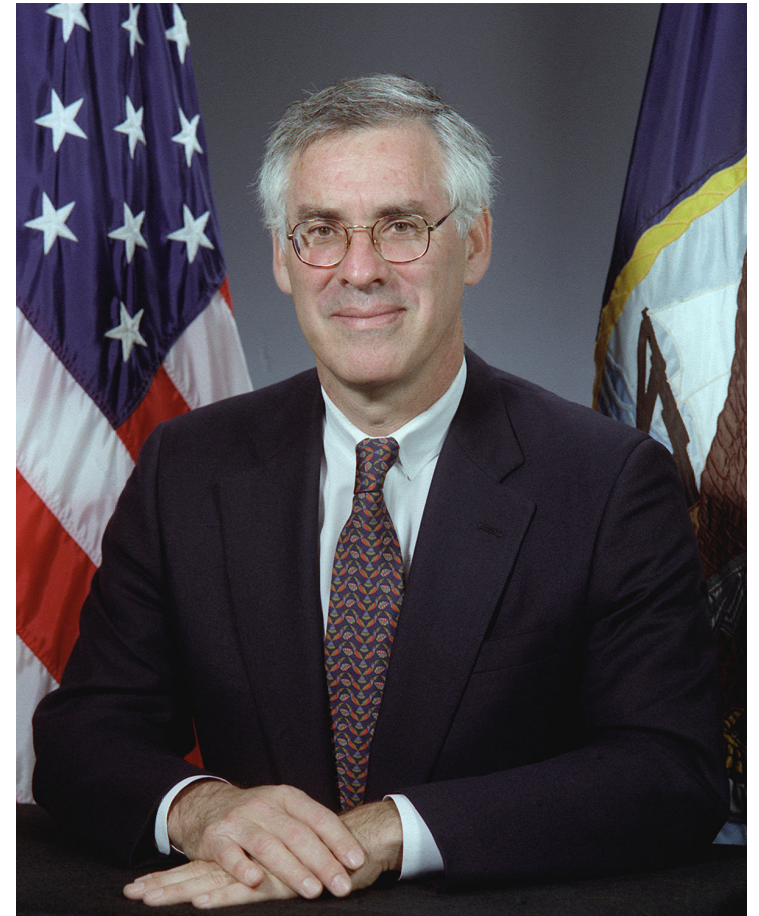


# Shackleton and Literature

- Shackleton “crisscrossed the globe visiting Europe, South America, the Far East, the Middle East, China, Africa, and the United States. But nothing opened his mind to the vastness, richness, and complexity of the world the way his books did. They took him beyond the scope of his personal experience.” After he met Emily Dorman, his future wife, she introduced him to Robert Browning, who “would be a particular guiding light for Shackleton for the rest of his life.”
- G.K. Chesterton said that Browning “was a keen artist, a keen scholar, he could put his finger on anything, and he had a memory like the British Museum.” He, like Shackleton, was also an optimist, whose “optimism was not founded on opinions which were the work of Browning, but on life which was the work of God.”

# Richard Danzig, Former Secretary of the Navy

Mr. Danzig “is convinced that Shackleton’s knowledge of a wide variety of literature contributed to the explorer’s success as a leader....One of the great advantages of reading fiction or history is it gives you the opportunity to understand the world from different vantage points and different time periods and different psychologies. That’s important to a leader, so one of my prime aims in distributing books is to get people to think outside themselves and to think broadly.”



# Western Literary Classics



**Os Guinness**

English Author, Apologist, & Social Critic  
1941 –

“If the great classics of Western imagination and ideas are really what we believe them to be – and what they have shown themselves to be – they have their own authority and speak best for themselves. When this happens they will always outlast their critics, open the eyes of those unfamiliar with them, surprise the blasé, delight the enthusiast, and lead generation after generation to fresh levels of discovery and appreciation.”



# James Sire on Reading

“Read the best books available  
on the topics that are most  
relevant to your call in life.”

*Habits of the Mind*



**Dr. James Sire**

1933-2018

Former Senior Editor, InterVarsity Press  
Apologist, Author, Lecturer



# Shackleton & Self-Assessment

- A schoolmaster who met Shackleton after he had become a famous explorer confessed, “We never discovered you when you were at Dulwich.” “No,” Shackleton replied sympathetically, “but I had not then discovered myself.”
- At the age of 15, he announced to his family that he was going to leave home for life on the seas. “I wanted to be free. I wanted to escape from a routine which didn’t at all agree with my nature and which, therefore, was doing no good to my character. Some boys take to school like ducks to water; for some boys, whether they take to it or not, the discipline is good; but for a few rough spirits the system is chafing, not good, and the sooner they are pitched into the world, the better. I was one of those.”

# Drucker on Self-Assessment



**Peter Drucker**  
1909-2005

“Self-assessment is the first action requirement of leadership: the constant resharpening, constant refocusing, never being really satisfied....Self-assessment can and should convert good intentions and knowledge into effective action – not next year but tomorrow morning.”





# Shackleton's Commitment to His Vision

- His father helped him secure a decent cabin-boy position, while his mother encouraged him “to pursue his dreams so he would have no regrets later.”
- He traveled to Liverpool and joined the crew of the sailing ship, *Hoghton Tower*.
- Shackleton learned his trade during the next four years at sea.
- In 1894, he passed his examination for Second Mate and, two years later, obtained his First Mate's ticket. In 1898, at the age of 24, he was certified as a Master Mariner, qualifying him to command a British ship anywhere in the world.

# Shackleton's Expeditions

- 1901-1903: *Discovery* Expedition; he was appointed junior officer on the Antarctic expedition led by Robert Falcon Scott; unsuccessful; came within 460 miles of the South Pole; Shackleton, showing signs of scurvy, was sent home on the relief ship.
- 1907-1909: *Nimrod* Expedition; Shackleton and three companions came within 97 miles of the South Pole and planted a flag there which had been donated by Queen Alexandra; but they could go no further; Shackleton had bested Scott's record for the Farthest South by 357 miles; he was knighted and showered with awards from many countries.

# First to Reach the South Pole

- Norway's Roald Amundsen reached the South Pole on December 14, 1911.



- Note: Four months later, the *Titanic* sank in the early morning of April 15, 1912.



**Roald Amundsen**  
1872-1928



# Leadership Principles: Bold Vision

1. “Be bold in vision and careful in planning. Dare to try something new, but be meticulous enough in your proposal to give your ideas a good chance of succeeding” (Morrell and Capparell).
2. Attempt something so great for God, it’s doomed to failure unless God be in it” (John E. Haggai).
3. “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God” (William Carey).
4. “Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams. Much more than a dreamer is required to bring it to reality; but the dream must be there first” (Robert K. Greenleaf).





# Leadership Principles: Bold Vision

5. “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality” (Max De Pree).
6. “It’s tragic that so many times God’s people seem impervious to the opportunities all about them. They settle for less when God wants them to master the highest echelons of achievement” (John Haggai).
7. “Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our mental and physical resources” (William James).



# Leadership Principles: Bold Vision

8. Shackleton said, “I dreamed prodigiously about big things ahead, big things in the nature of adventure” (Morrell & Capparell).
9. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (Eccl. 9:10).
10. “But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt. 6:33, NASV). “Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met” (Mt. 6:33, *The Message*).

# Helen Keller



John F. Kennedy, Evelyn Seide, and Helen Keller (right) at the White House, Washington D.C., April 8, 1961

Helen Keller was asked on a college campus, “Is there anything worse than losing your eyesight?”

“Yes,” she responded. “Losing your vision.”

# Biblical Assumptions

Philosophically speaking, the only foundation that will support a life worth living is one that is formed with divine truth as it is given to us in God's revealed Word, the Bible. All others are little more than eroding sand that cannot withstand the assailing storms of life. History and experience clearly demonstrate the vanity and consequences of building upon the collected wisdom of man, rather than upon the wisdom that comes from Creator God. The following assumptions can be made, either directly or by necessary inference, from God's Word:

- God has a plan for every person He created.
- Every Christian ought to have a clear vision for his life and work.
- Gaining a clear vision is not necessarily an easy task for us.



# Biblical Assumptions

- God imparts His vision to anyone who seeks Him with his whole heart.
- Through prayer, the Holy Spirit empowers us to fulfill God's vision.
- When we repent, God extends His grace and forgives us for living out past visions that were contrary to His words and ways.
- With God's help, we can reevaluate our lives in the light of His Word and set a better course.
- The heart of God's vision for us is to know and love Him, and to serve other people.
- Fulfilling God's vision for our lives results in eternal rewards.
- Joy and peace are two of God's great gifts to those who seek to live life under His rule and reign.

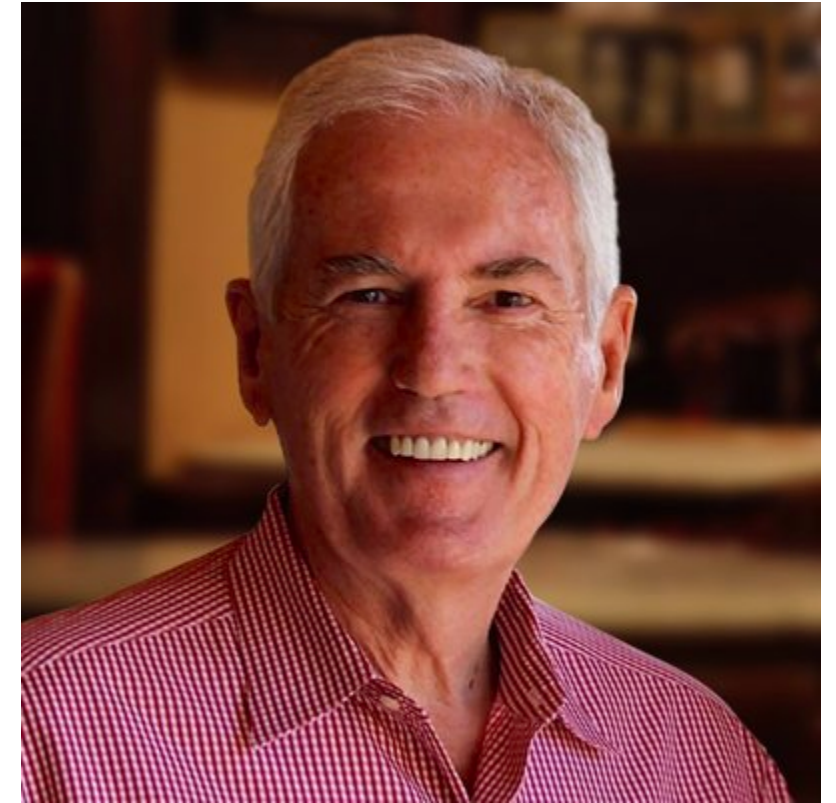
# How to Capture God's Vision for Your Life

- Know God and yourself.
- Answer the question: Who are you? By what name does God call you?
- Openly identify and own your worldview.
- Enter into solitude and silence to hear God's voice.
- Seek Him with all of your heart (Jer. 29:13).
- Look for men and women of understanding to give wise counsel.
- Approve or test the will of God...and continue to obey Him as He leads.
- Look to the Holy Spirit to illumine the Word to your heart.
- Enter into a long series of deepening surrenders to God.

# Ten Years From Now

## How old will you be 10 years from today?

- What 3 things would you like to accomplish by 10 years from today?
- What 3 things are keeping your 10 year dreams from coming true?
- What 3 things could you do today to start removing those road blocks?
- What 3 things could you do today to inch your way toward your dreams?
- What 3 things...in 10 years...will you wish you had started today?



**Bobb Biehl**

Executive Mentor, Consultant, Author



# Theodore Roosevelt: *The Man in the Arena*



It is not the critic who counts;  
Not the man who points out  
How the strong man stumbled,  
Or where the doer of deeds  
Could have done them better.  
The credit belongs to the person  
Who is actually in the arena.  
Whose face is marred by dust  
And sweat and blood;



# *The Man in the Arena*

Who strives valiantly; who errs  
And comes up short again and again;  
Who knows the great enthusiasms,  
The great devotions,  
And spends himself in a worthy  
cause.  
Who at best knows in the end

Triumph of high achievement;  
And who at worst if he fails  
While daring greatly,  
Knows that his place shall never be  
With those cold and timid souls  
Who know neither defeat nor  
victory.

“The Man in the Arena” was a part of ***Citizenship in a Republic***, a speech that was given by the former President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, at the Sorbonne in Paris, France on April 23, 1910.