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The New Adapters: Shaping Ideas to Fit Your Congregation

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE NEW ADAPTERS: SHAPING IDEAS TO FIT YOUR CONGREGATION

*By Jacob Armstrong, Adam Hamilton,
& Mike Slaughter
Nashville, TN: Abington Press (2015)
Kindle edition, 120 pages*

Reviewed by MARK MAGNUSSON

The book *The New Adapters* by Jacob Armstrong, with added conversation from Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter, addresses the need for the church of today to adapt its methods to meet a culture that is continually changing. The author maintains that the church is “God’s designed vessel” in carrying forward the mission of sharing the “timeless story” of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that the gospel will always remain constant, but the methods of sharing the gospel have changed and will continually change over time and over different cultures in America and in the world (loc. xiv-xv). With an emphasis on North America, the author shares his ideas based on principles of church leadership to address the need of church leaders leading members into a work of adapting the

methods of their current church in order to become relevant in the community in which their church is located.

The question of relevance has become increasingly prevalent in church leadership, and is ever present in “millennial” discussions. The difficult question comes down to how churches should adapt their visions, messages, and/or worship styles in order to be relevant to those they are trying to reach with the gospel. As leaders, it is imperative to acknowledge the fact that times have changed. Methods of door knocking, phone soliciting, and mass mailing have had their success in the past but have increasingly become less effective. In addition, there has been a paradigm shift where the focus today is “less on buildings and more on building communities of people” (loc. 5, 29). As the author points out, it’s only by “listening to and learning from the community” that we can become acquainted with them in order to connect with them and minister to them in order to get a response from them (loc. 3).

The author also importantly alluded to the fact that Christ Himself engaged not only in the synagogues but also in the communities where the poor, needy, and disconnected were in order to meet them where they were and make the gospel known to them (loc. 14-15). Christ’s methods have been written in the Word of God and are lasting examples of how the church will be able to reach those in the community around them. One thing to note about Christ is that He did not become like the people He ministered to; they became like Him. Should there be caution in the wind for leaders adapting their church and members in a way that they become like the world? God’s people are to be a peculiar people living in the world but not being of the

world. There is always a need for prayerful discernment when attempting to adapt methods in order to reach out to the community.

At the onset of the book the author established that the “vision of a church has to fit the mission field” in which the church is located (loc. 2). This point is clear and can apply to all leaders and congregations. The way people dress, think, and act will vary from place to place. For example, a church in preparation for a wedding in a rural area which is decorated with empty shotgun shells loaded with flowers and the bride and groom using a branding iron making their mark on a prepared log is going to vary from a wedding in an upscale urban environment.

Human tendency is to create a vision that fits our own preferences and what we think it should be before considering those we are trying to reach. The first step in creating that vision, after prayer and seeking God, is to “listen to and learn from the community” (loc. 3–9). Leaders must be aware of the demographics, unique opportunities or challenges, and must spend time in the community by creating community events or getting involved with events that are already in place in the community (loc. 3–9). Once a vision is created that gives sight to a congregation, all other aspects of how the unchanging message of the Gospel is to be proclaimed, how the church is going to look, how liturgy in worship is practiced, down to how members are disciplined, can be adapted to fit that vision.

Another point the author addressed throughout the book is for leaders and congregations to reach out to those who feel disconnected from God and the church (loc. xv). This includes both those who have been in the church to some degree

and those who have not. We need to be aware that we often create a “closed-loop” in our congregations (loc. 40). The way we talk, worship, or act often excludes those that are not connected with the group. Creating a “closed-loop” pushes away those who feel disconnected rather than inviting them in. Members need to be aware of this and make sure that they create an environment that is open and accepting to all.

Overall, I would recommend the book to leaders who are endeavoring to be continuously relevant today as time moves on and cultures change. The author is straight to the point and does not overwhelm the reader with vast amounts of information that can lead to tedious reading and often lead to more questions. There is a need to adapt to changing cultures in order to be relevant while guarding against the danger of ceasing to be relevant to the mission and methods of Jesus.

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SUPERBOSSSES

By Sydney Finkelstein
New York, NY: Portfolio Penguin
(2016)
Paperback, 268 pages

Reviewed by JOSEPH BATES

Sydney Finkelstein’s book, *Superbosses*, provides a thorough, yet concise summary of discipleship (mentorship) at its highest level. Finkelstein brings to life his philosophy as he explores the mindset and techniques of superbosses with proven records and phenomenal results. The success and failures of superbosses in the corporate, sports, and small business world beautifully