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Review of Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders, by Justin Irving & Mark L. Strauss

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BOOK REVIEWS

OBED YAMASOMBI

LEADERSHIP IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES FOR SERVANT LEADERS

*By Justin Irving & Mark L. Strauss
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker (2019)
Paperback, 224 pages*

Reviewed by OBED YAMASOMBI

Leadership is one of the most significant and inexhaustible topics of study. Over the years, numerous studies have uncovered the mysteries underpinning this phenomenon and how it affects human lives and societies. The authors of this book introduce leadership as one of the most observed yet least understood phenomena in the world. This book is an excellent resource for both students and practitioners of leadership. In reviewing this book, the principle criterion includes the content, the authors' background and views, its application, and the recommendations.

Authors Justin Irving and Mark Strauss are highly respected persons in their field of expertise. Irving is a leadership researcher and educator at Bethel Seminary in San Diego, California, with expertise in servant leadership and its application to teams and organizational effectiveness. Strauss is a biblical scholar with expertise in New Testament studies in biblical translation. He has authored more than fifteen books and specializes in making sound biblical scholarship accessible to his readers. Coming from these rich and diverse backgrounds, both men bring to the table some amazing, relevant insights into the study of leadership. Their biblical and scholarly perspec-

tives on leadership lay a robust foundation for Christian leadership and what it means to be a leader that the world needs.

The book meshes well with other leadership books of both biblical and nonbiblical contexts. Although the book is titled *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders*, the principles are not limited to church or religious contexts with application for a wider audience. All organizations and communities consist of leaders and followers alike; each depends on the other to make things happen. Without a leader, nothing will move forward. Without a follower, nothing will take its form and shape. Both are important in the community.

Each of the book's nine chapters discusses one key theme of leadership practice, highlighting its significance in teams and organizations. The nine leadership practices are clustered into three main sections: authentic and purposeful leaders, understanding people's priorities, and navigating toward effectiveness. The chapters are logically arranged, making the book an easy read.

Each of the nine leadership practices stems from thoughtful research on both past and present leadership behaviors of teams and organizations. The nine practices are systematically presented, beginning with the biblical exposition of the leadership practice. Then the authors explain the leadership practice concerning contemporary research and theory that stand behind the practice, illustrating it with examples from both the biblical and contemporary narratives. Finally, the discussion of each leadership practice ends with practical recommendations. The orderliness of the book confirms the book to be an academic and practical resource for leaders.

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O B E D Y A M A S O M B I

The central theme behind this book is empowering leadership. Throughout the book, the authors discuss the significance of empowering others to grow and flourish in their work. What matters most is the mission and effectiveness of the organization, and for this to happen, people must be empowered to grow and/or develop their skills and knowledge in their chosen field of work. Irving and Strauss strongly believe that when leaders and followers are properly empowered, their best will be brought forward in both their performance and attitude towards work. Drawing from Henry Ford's leadership experience, the authors commented that when employees are rightfully empowered, they will not only bring their hands to the organization but they will bring their whole being into the organization, irrespective of their position as leader or follower. They define empowering leadership as "a process by which leaders and followers' partner together for the purpose of achieving common goals and shared vision" (p. 8).

The leader-follower relationship becomes a pivotal part of an organization. Irving and Strauss present relationship as one of the critical components of empowering people. They believe that the success and effectiveness of an organization depend on every member of the organization. They view organizations as a family or a web where each member is connected or attached to a team or group. This helps in knowing the needs of others and providing the necessary assistance that a person needs to do his or her job better. For instance, the first practice mentioned in the book is "modeling what matters." Modeling is built on the relationship between the leader and the follower. Modeling or exemplary

leadership comes into play when a follower models the leader.

From this book's analysis, the authors confirm that empowering leadership has derived from the study of servant leadership. The biblical description of empowering others to grow and be better equipped for service is based on the biblical concepts of servant and transformational leadership. Biblically, the description of empowering others fits well with the narratives of Jesus Christ as one who came (build relationship) to seek and to serve (empower others) humanity.

What makes this book unique from other leadership books that it addresses the theme of empowering leadership, using narratives and biblical applications. Additionally, the authors use biblical passages to describe the practice of modeling others. Irving and Strauss describe the practice of modeling others by using the biblical illustration of the Apostle Paul. In his Epistles to the early churches, Paul urged his readers and church members to be imitators of Christ and or to be his (Paul) imitators (1 Cor. 4: 16, 11:1; Phil. 3:17, 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7). The authors urge leaders to be walking examples of the vision. The authors present three fundamental points of empowering leadership through modeling: (1) modeling as a key to empowering followers, (2) modeling as a development approach to leadership, and (3) modeling as a transformational approval to leadership.

Empowering leadership is not a new thing. Many leaders in past and present times have discussed and practiced it. A good example presented in this book is Collen Barrett, former president of Southwest Airlines. In his term as the president of the airline company from 2001 to 2008, he focused primarily on empowering his

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ANDRE ANDERSON

workers. His employees and clients were his priority. His vision and practice bore a positive result on his organization, employees, and his clients.

The nine practices described in this book are relevant to all leaders, especially to those who wish to make a difference in their organization or community. Moreover, the practices are theoretically and practically relevant. With biblical examples and concepts that lay its foundation, this book is highly recommended for all Christian leaders, educators, and students of leadership.

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THE CULTURE QUESTION: HOW TO CREATE A WORK- PLACE WHERE PEOPLE LIKE TO WORK

*By Randy Grieser, Eric Stutzman,
Wendy Loewen, & Michael Labun
Winnipeg, MB, Canada: Achieve
Publishing (2019)
Kindle edition, 228 pages*

Reviewed by ANDRE ANDERSON

In the book *The Culture Question: How to Create a Workplace Where People Like to Work*, the authors Randy Grieser, Eric Stutzman, Wendy Loewen, and Michael Labun have produced an excellent tool to help people create and change workplace culture. They suggest that leaders must inspire people to rally around purpose. This is the most important thing that employees must focus on. This book focuses on the importance of culture. Creating an environment where people become inspired doesn't happen by accident. It occurs

when workplaces are intentional.

The authors suggest environments where people feel a sense of fulfillment are created when people are organized based on their abilities. When people work in areas where their strengths are utilized, they will find their working experiences rewarding, stimulating, and worthwhile. In theory, I support what the authors are suggesting; however, there must be a balance. Personal fulfillment and bottom-line objectives are both important.

In the chapter "Focus Your Leadership Team on People," the author insists that empowering leaders should promote collaborative decision-making information sharing and teamwork. In contrast, directive leadership uses one's positional power to actively structure the work of subordinates and lay out expectations for their compliance. I struggled in this chapter because there are times where both autonomy and directives are necessary to accomplish the goal.

On page 73, the author suggests that one of the worst things any organization can do is have leaders who ignore problems. Since everything affects culture, I would argue that this issue may single-handedly be the most important thing that creates the right culture. In the moments where issues need to be addressed, leaders must create rules and boundaries that will facilitate perceived justice, becoming a part of how the organization operates.

In Chapter 6, the authors discussed peak-performing teams working towards one goal. This is crucial. After all, no two teams are ever alike because no two teams have the same leadership or chemistry. As long as the work is being completed based on the organizational expectations, how things are completed is not as impor-