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Review of Rick Sessoms, *Leading with story: Cultivating Christ-centered leaders in a storycentric generation*

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Leading With Story: Cultivating Christ-Centered Leaders in a Storycentric Generation

by Rick Sessoms, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016.

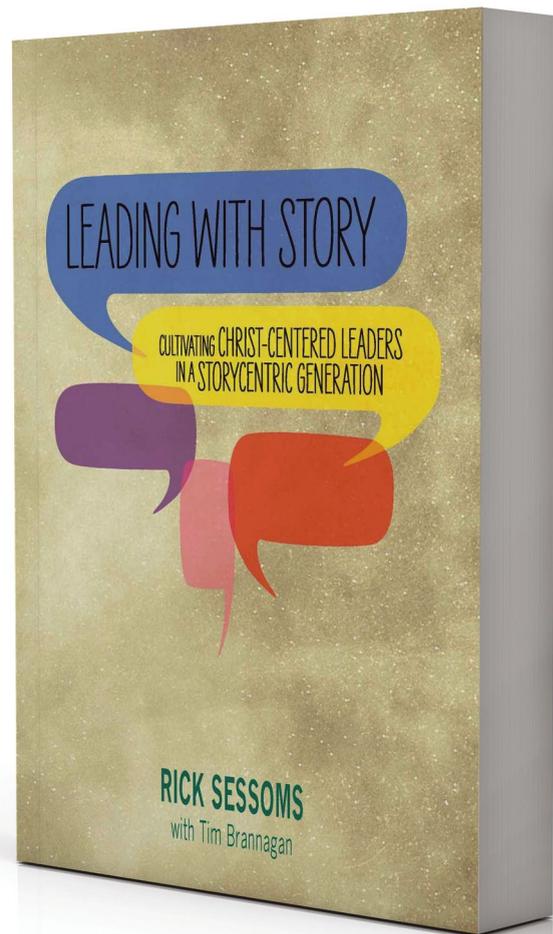
In his introductory chapter, author Rick Sessoms makes the compelling observation that 80 percent of the world's people, including 70 percent of Americans, are story-centric learners and communicators; that is, they prefer to learn and are most likely to be influenced through stories, pictures, drama, and music rather than through reading and writing.

Yet, more than 90 percent of Christian workers communicate through a highly literacy-based approach. This disconnect greatly limits the multiplication of leaders for the growing global churches and veers from the example of Jesus. Through engaging stories, biblical insights, leadership research, field-tested methods, and practical models of effective leadership development, *Leading With Story* offers unique solutions that will inspire and challenge any who want to raise up or to be raised up as Christ-centered leaders in this story-centric generation.

Sessoms's book is primarily about how we can reach those in literate and nonliterate cultures through the training of Christ-centered leaders using story-centric methods to which they can relate. Jesus' primary method of teaching was through the use of stories. The Bible is often referred to as the "Grand Narrative," and it is filled with stories from the opening words in Genesis to the closing of Revelation.

This book intends to equip both practitioners and recipients of leadership development with (1) a grasp of and appreciation for story-centric learning; (2) a comprehensive leadership-development model; (3) an effective leadership-development process; (4) a more precise understanding of Christ-centered leadership; and (5) a field-tested sample of story-centric, Christ-centered leadership development.

This book is divided into four parts. Part 1 examines the topic of story-centric learning and its prominent place in our lives. This section explores the misconceptions that surround story-centric learning, the relationship of literacy and story-centric



learning, and the role of story as a primary guide to living and leadership.

Part 2 addresses leadership development. This section explains the evolution and current state of Christian leadership development, defines the comprehensive scope of leadership development that aims to cultivate Christ-centered leaders, and recommends a proven process for developing effective leaders today.

Part 3 presents Christ-centered leadership by outlining the trends of leadership over the past century, explaining the current state of Christian leadership, and proposing the need for a leadership reformation, following the example of Christ the leader.

Part 4 describes the Garden Project, a pioneer leadership development initiative designed to cultivate Christ-centered leaders in story-centric communities. This section shows how Sessoms's theological and theoretical framework can be applied in practice.



Leading With Story targets several types of readers. It targets church leaders who are committed to raising up other competent ministry leaders to enhance our Christian witness. It reaches those who are cultivating other emerging leaders and are asking, “What are the effective methods for reaching others?” It is also for those who wish to provide leadership development in story-centric communities as well as those who simply want to know how to be a Christ-centered leader.

After 40 years of ministry, I am more convinced than ever before that stories and images are more effective for teaching and life formation than abstract concepts. Jesus modeled this for us in His teachings.

Jesus’ parables are seemingly simple and memorable stories, often with imagery, and all convey deep and practical messages capturing the heart of the teachings of Jesus. Many of His parables refer to simple everyday things, such as a woman baking bread (parable of the leaven), a man knocking on his neighbor’s door at night (parable of the friend at night), or the aftermath of a roadside mugging (parable of the good Samaritan); yet they deal with major religious themes, such as the growth of the kingdom of God, the importance of prayer, and the meaning of love. The beauty about them is that they stick in the mind and move the hearer to a better life.

What makes this book a must-read is its relationship to a methodology for learning and leadership for literate and nonliterate leaders or learners in the West and East and everywhere in-between. Current and traditional teaching and training models must be reconsidered in light of such compelling research and verified practical methods addressed in the book. This is a book every church leader should read who takes seriously the task of reaching every tongue, tribe, and nation. If there is one overriding theme in Sessoms’s book, it is that leadership must always be Christ-centered—that means, it should be patterned after the model of Jesus. ❏

—Reviewed by S. Joseph Kidder, DMin, professor of Christian Ministry and Discipleship, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

► Inspiring through stories

Sweimeh, Jordan—Each year, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) facilitates two weeks of working group sessions with roughly 200 staff members from its 131 country offices.

A leadership summit kicked off this year’s meetings introducing three pillars of thought for ADRA’s leaders to consider in the coming year, namely, to create clarity, generate energy, and thrive.

Participants were also introduced to an array of workshops and plenary classes. Leading experts and specialists spoke on topics of spirituality, influential leadership, employee relations, diversity, work ethics, and mentoring, to name a few.

Karla Cole, director of annual giving at ADRA, attended a creative workshop focused on storytelling in which **Bill Knott**, executive editor of the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines, was the presenter. “I found the storytelling workshop to be a unique way to inspire,” she said.

“Storytelling is as much what the teller says, but also what the listener hears,” Knott said during his storytelling workshop. “A story can be internalized by the hearer to make it his own and be changed by it.” He added that every culture uses stories and that stories have the power to let God speak to each individual and their personal narrative. [Kimi Roux-James/ADRA International News]

To hear Bill Knott explain how to better engage your congregation during sermon time, moving past the days of passive listening, go to “The Interactive Sermon” on the *Ministry in Motion* website, ministryinmotion.tv/episode/the-interactive-sermon/.



Bill Knott