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Book Review: Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry from Micro to Mega by R. A. Vernon

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Upton: Book Review: Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry from Micro to those, it provides a valuable tool for churches courageous enough to embark on this process of discovering their own “Church Unique.” His honesty in looking at the state of the current church and the call for change to reach the least, the last, and the lost is refreshing and inspiring if not a bit daunting. I would not advise any church to rely solely on the contents of this book to effect the wholesale change it calls for without the careful assistance of a trained consultant. Just the time investment alone might be enough to sway many churches from the perseverance and objectivity needed to complete the process. The book is also valuable in that it advances ideas designed to alter our perspective on the way we look at church. The value, though, is not in the ideas but in the rallying cry to act on and to follow what he proposes, as we all seek to live out God’s vision for our lives daily.

Vernon, R.A. *Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry from Micro to Mega*. Cleveland, OH: Victory Media & Publishing, 2011.

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A review by Jeremy Upton, pastor of City of Refuge Church in Miami, Florida. He is a graduate of Morehouse College and Dallas Theological Seminary (Master of Theology). He has completed postgraduate study in preaching at Oxford University in England.

Among the many criticisms leveled at churches in North America in general, and the megachurches in particular, are charges that the churches are too focused on money, are too personality-driven, and are not doing enough to help people in need. Vernon seeks to challenge the current crop of pastors and church planters to address these issues in creative and community-oriented ways. His missional approach grows out of his theological construct, which was informed by the history of the African-American church and influenced by the liberation theology of James Cone.

Being forced into church planting, in 2000 Vernon founded The Word Church in Cleveland, Ohio. Since that time, The Word Church has seen over 30,000 people either come to Christ or join the church. The church has grown to five worship locations and over nine weekend worship services. He has built The Word Church on a strong commitment to outreach and impact for Christ in the community. In thirteen years, Vernon has balanced a fast-growing church with an expanding family, and he has completed three degrees, culminating in his D.Min. from Ashland Theological Seminary. His commitment to contextualized and creatively relevant ministry is evident in the impact that The Word Church has had on the greater Cleveland area.

In *Size Does Matter*, Vernon seeks to state and defend the idea that although every church is not supposed to be mega, every church should be growing. This statement, while very much in line with what the Church Growth Movement has postulated for many years, clarifies why every church's methodology must speak relevantly and powerfully to its culture and community. Vernon uses the story and experience of The Word Church as a case study. Thankfully, he is also honest enough to include the failures and lessons learned the hard way, as well as the victories.

278 The first chapters of the book provide an apologetic for the megachurch. Influenced by Scott Thumma and Dave Travis' book, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, on the phenomenology of the megachurch, Vernon asserts that the megachurch, particularly in urban settings, must have contextualized community ministry as its main reason for being big. He states, "The megachurch has a biblical obligation to have the heart of Christ and embrace the challenge of meeting broken people where they are on a daily basis" (31). Additionally, Vernon argues that the church's assignment must be determined by the context of the community's needs. Most would agree that this qualifies as a missional approach, which allows the megachurch to be "a powerful force when it understands its duty and call to serve" (35).

Size Does Matter seeks to be an academic apologetic for the need for megachurches to maintain, in the current vernacular of church studies, what would be called "missional" ministry, particularly in urban contexts. Pointedly, Vernon argues that the Lord has blessed these churches with growth and size in order to have a greater impact on their communities. Says Vernon, "The question that megachurch leaders (in the Black Megachurch in particular) have to ask themselves is, 'What do large numbers, both in offerings and attendance, have to do with the existential conditions of hurting people in its community and city as a whole?'" (28). Vernon's apologetic arises from his theology of liberation and the church's responsibility to the lost and the disenfranchised. This so-called *Black Theology*, initially espoused by James Cone, calls for the church to embody the ministry of Jesus in its impact to the urban, African-American community. This echoes what the missional movement champions now in every context. While Vernon never utilizes the terminology, his call for urban megachurches to minister to their contexts is, by definition, missional.

The real power of this book is not in Vernon's missional apologetic, however. As Vernon tells the story of The Word Church's growth, the truly impactful nature of its philosophy of ministry comes to light. The creative methods that characterize this church's story help to spark ingenuity and inspiration to the

Upton: Book Review: Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry from Micro to pastor who needs proven, missional growth strategies to employ. The topics fleshed out in the book help the reader to look at the pragmatics of growth strategies, though not from the traditional, attractional mindset. Deeply rooted in a kingdom theology for the city, Vernon offers suggestions and insights into church facilities, finances, outreach, weekend worship planning, marketing, and several other key areas for growth. For example, Vernon relates how Disneyworld is best at ameliorating all of the downsides of a visit to the park by the wonderful experience that engages people from the moment they arrive. “As long as you keep creating experiences, the cycle will continue to expand, and you’ll be in a powerful position to take your city (and beyond) for Christ (153).” Even in dealing with pragmatic growth methodologies, the main thrust and focus for Vernon never strays from being a church that uses its influences and resources to impact positively and spiritually its community.

Though Vernon bills this book as an apologetic for megachurches that responsibly do “mega ministry,” *Size Does Matter* is more accurately a church growth book, though from an updated and urban perspective. Vernon is concerned with three main items: winning souls, growing churches, and making a citywide impact. Indeed, this book is an expansion of his doctoral dissertation on church growth from an African-American experience. In this vein, Vernon covers the topics with depth, creativity, and practicality. Ultimately, then, the reader has to confront and wrestle with the author’s contention that “the purpose of having large numbers is not simply for numbers’ sake, but rather for the sake of helping the marginalized and indigent (10).” What grows a church? The key is following the mandates of Jesus to make disciples. Christ commands disciples to band together in faith communities known as churches. If a church has many committed, faithful members, why has God allowed the large number of disciplined, evangelizing believers to remain together? Vernon contends that God’s purpose is for that church to “use the resources and people afforded . . . by the grace of God to help the less fortunate regardless of class or color (35).”

Additionally, churches could also use *Size Does Matter* as an effective primer for church leadership teams, church planting core groups, or staff training and development. Vernon’s style and the pragmatic nature with which he covers the methods and strategies make this book a useful and flexible tool for use in different settings and contexts. Indeed, the core principles in the book serve as the basis of the curriculum Vernon uses in his annual leadership conferences (15). Currently, this author uses sections of the book in his leadership training units and ministry teams training to introduce philosophy of ministry and the approach for strategy for lay leaders. Experientially speaking, it helps to ground members of the church’s

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team on the same ideals, goals, and methodology, even if the actual programming
ideas and logistics differ.

From a critical standpoint, *Size Does Matter*'s only disappointment was that
the readers would greatly benefit from more theological and exegetical depth in
Vernon's application of Black liberation theology to his ecclesiology. The
uniqueness of Vernon's arrival at the same point of the current "missional"
movement, but from a completely different place, is both interesting and deserving
of more depth. This is especially important in light of the criticism levied at the
liberation theology movement from conservative evangelical camps in the late
seventies and eighties. These same camps have wholeheartedly embraced the tenets
of "missional" ministry. This book would have benefitted greatly from a more
detailed explanation of his theological conclusions and an exegesis of the Matthew
25 and Luke 4 passages alluded to in the book (95). This would have fit well within
his stated purposes for the book as well as shed light on an interesting theological
vantage point in the areas of church growth and missional ministry.

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Size Does Matter is a book that offers a unique and interesting perspective on
"missional" church ministry from a pragmatic, methodological approach. Though
it is written from more of a testimonial standpoint, this is still a relevant work for
any pastor or leader who is seeking specific examples of what "missional" ministry
looks like, particularly in an urban context. This book is useful as a tool for
sparking creativity in ministry, as a primer for a church-planting team or core
group, or as a challenge to pastoral teams of megachurches to stay committed to
making a tangible impact in their communities. It also is useful as a resource for
church leadership teams that endeavor to stay faithful to a missional vision.
Inspiring, insightful, and challenging, *Size Does Matter* is a must-read for those
committed to ministry in the twenty-first century.

Cannings, Paul. *Making Your Vision a Reality: Proven Steps to Develop and Implement Your
Church Vision Plan*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013. 176 pp. \$10.64.

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student in practical theology at MABTS. He is the church planter and pastor of Christ Hope
Church in Cordova, TN.

Leadership is a critical component of the pastoral ministry. While not
neglecting the critical ministries of the Word and pastoral care, the pastor must
effectively lead God's people entrusted to his care as a faithful steward of his
calling. Cannings acknowledged the struggle among many pastors who, while