Review of Leadership by the Book: Cultivating Spirit-Led Kingdom Leaders by Galen Wendell Jones

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Book Review

Leadership by the Book: Cultivating Spirit-Led Kingdom Leaders

By Galen Wendell Jones
B&H Academic, 2023
129 pages
US$24.99

Reviewed by Jeremy Langley, DMin candidate at Liberty University. He has served in pastoral ministry in his home state of Arkansas for 12 years.

There is no shortage of books on leadership. Bookstores and websites seem to overflow with volumes expounding upon the latest and greatest leadership strategies. But what if the secret to developing leaders in the church was not new and not really a secret? What if the key to cultivating the next generation of leaders has been readily available to us all along? That is the basis for the argument Galen Jones makes in Leadership by the Book: Cultivating Spirit-Led Kingdom Leaders. In eight chapters, he provides encouragement and insight as he weaves together the argument that true Christian leaders are those appointed by God, and who “display the active indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit” in their lives (9).

Jones makes it obvious from the book’s introduction that the topic is deeply personal to him. Like all genuine Christian leaders, he contends that his journey began with his conversion and it was clarified upon his surrender to God’s call to ministry. “When one recognizes Jesus as the King, it involves much more than making a simple theological claim,” he writes. “The recognition that he is King has implications for a person’s entire life” (2).
Leadership by the Book stands out from other leadership development books because it places the focus on the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, not the individual leader. He presents the contents in two parts. The first half makes a clear presentation of “The God News.” This phrase “is a reclaiming of what the term ‘Good News’ once conveyed, i.e., the transformative truth of Jesus” (4). Jones demonstrates that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel, making Him the Lord of all Scripture and the model for leaders throughout both Testaments and today (23). An entire chapter is devoted to the model set by Abraham which Jones contends is “the foundational template” for church leaders (44). Having demonstrated the truth of Christ’s identity and the importance of knowing Him as Savior and King, the author concludes the first half with a leadership paradox, “The real onus is not on who is following us, but rather whom we are following — and what kind of follower we are” (75).

In the second half, Jones builds on the previous paradoxical statement with the argument that “all leaders (in the Kingdom) are chosen, appointed, and authorized by the God of Heaven” (81). One of the primary tasks of Kingdom leaders is to raise up new leaders through discipleship all the while submitting to personal discipleship and continual spiritual growth. “When we are faithful to develop ourselves and pour into the lives of others, it is powerful to watch God use the leaders he called to influence others for his Kingdom’s sake,” Jones writes (105). Despite one’s best efforts, only those who “experience oneness with the Father, the witness of Jesus, and the witness of the Holy Spirit” can be true Kingdom leaders, he concludes (129).

Staying true to the book’s title, Jones relies heavily on scriptural citations to justify the ideas expressed in each chapter. This dependence on the Word of God over personal opinion adds credibility to his work. The arguments of the book are also strengthened through the use of footnotes to point the reader to related scholarly material.

One aspect of Leadership by the Book that I found beneficial is the way Jones keeps the reader engaged by inserting personal stories. While discussing the leadership model set forth by Abraham, the author writes about the challenges God often allows leaders to face and the maturity that should result. This point is illustrated with personal stories that include the struggle he and his wife have faced with infertility, watching his mentor struggle through the loss of a child and the horrors he learned of while visiting a former slave encampment in Africa. The emotion of these stories draws the reader in to hear the main point: “The rawest parts of life can be the trials God uses to sharpen our endurance and make us mature believers” (38).
Jones includes a significant amount of theology and theory throughout each chapter. However, one thing that makes *Leadership by the Book* useful is the way the author presents practical points of application from which anyone in Christian leadership can profit. Of particular interest, he provides seven leadership principles from the life of Abraham (28-43), a five-point paradigm for equipping tomorrow’s leaders in today’s church (96-97), and eight points for effective leader-follower formation (97-105).

*Leadership by the Book* would be a beneficial read for any pastor or others in church leadership. The practical steps outlined in the preceding paragraph can be quickly implemented in most church settings. Seminary students and others who desire a position of church leadership would also profit from the raw truth espoused by Jones. Unlike the authors of some leadership books, he does not only tell the glamorous side of the leadership preparation journey. He also exposes the challenges. “The Lord does his best work in the seasons of difficulty,” he writes about Abraham’s story (44). As a young leader, I appreciate his candor.

One of the book’s final claims demonstrates the fact that how we lead the church has a direct impact on how we fulfill the Great Commission: “As we understand the biblical foundation for leadership, we understand more clearly the mission of God; the more the mission becomes a daily part of our lives, the more we are transformed by it” (129).