

Book Review

Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders

By Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019. 218 pp. \$17.99.

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Leadership is a stewardship. Whether you are a church pastor, missionary, Christian educator, or parachurch leader, God has set you in a place of leadership with tremendous influence. It can be exhilarating to see the ministry organization entrusted to your care flourish to new levels of effectiveness. It can also be disheartening when the organization you love and lead begins to flounder.

How a leader shepherds the ministry organization can either catapult or curtail mission momentum and realization.

This is what makes reading *Leadership in Christian Perspective* by Justin Irving and Mark Strauss so important. If you are a leader and you want to build a more team-oriented, collaborative leadership culture, this resource is well worth your time.

Irving and Strauss's work is foundational to the process of (1) integrating biblical truths with contemporary leadership theory, and (2) building on this foundation to better understand and embrace a more Christ-like, empowering approach to the practice of servant leadership.

In the words of the authors, "Because the mission and effectiveness of most organizations matter, we want to see leaders learning to embrace the empowering approach to leadership practice."

Leadership in Christian Perspective is a refreshing and systematic look at servant leadership as first modeled by Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul as well as articulated by historical and contemporary leadership theory and practice.

The book is divided into three parts with each section delineating three essential leadership practices. Each one of the nine principles highlight the biblical foundations for leadership theory and research, along with suggested next steps and recommended readings for expanding these practices within an organizational context.

The first segment—part one—explores the vital place of character as reflected in a leader's authenticity and purpose. This section articulates the significance of the leader modeling what matters most for followers, as well as the leader's "honest self-evaluation" for fostering group collaboration out of a clear sense of personal and corporate purpose.

In part two Irving and Strauss call for the prioritization of other people and relationships. The authors assert that empowering leaders shift their focus and energy to team members, first, by recognizing the immense value each one brings to the team, second, by creating spaces for each person to uniquely contribute within the overarching organizational purpose, and third, by creating safe places “where creativity and connection foster innovation and productivity.”

In part three the authors exhort the reader to not only embody authenticity around clarity of purpose while considering team needs, but to also thoughtfully apply regular communication, accountability and supportive resourcing as three supplemental elements for greater effectiveness. As these three areas are addressed in the leader’s life and ministry he or she can rise to new levels of collaborative, empowering leadership, moving the ministry organization toward attaining prioritized goals and the overall mission.

One area for Irving and Strauss to consider in future editions of *Leadership in Christian Perspective* would be to better articulate the healthy tension between structural (or mechanistic) and organic approaches to organizational Christian leadership.

For example in Chapter 8 the authors emphasize the need to provide accountability beginning with “clear goals and expectations” (p. 166). However, who sets those goals and expectations? While it may be a single leader or a team of executive leaders, the greater the clarity of the organizational authority in the decision making process the more “empowerment” members can receive in fulfilling their particular role and function. Moreover, this framework will then guide “what” and “how” stakeholders “measure what matters.”

In order to thrive, these organizations must be galvanized by a solid organizational structure, a clear chain of command, and key systems to sustain unified accountability around the core values, purpose, and mission of the organization. What might seem too mechanistic actually promotes the creation of less siloed, more team-centered environments that maximize collaborative servant leadership and contribution to the mission mandate.

Overall, Irving and Strauss have published a practical and well written, biblically-oriented work on Christian leadership covering topics such as basic communication theory, intercultural competence, emotional intelligence, leader empowerment, servant leadership, team development, and transformational leadership.