

Book Review: Incarnate Leadership

by Carrie Cavanaugh

Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus by Bill Robinson, president of Whitworth University, may be a small book but it lacks nothing in punch. Bill Robinson doesn't write this book as an unimpassioned expert, but rather he shares his heart's convictions, struggles as a leader, and relationship with his savior. This openness and honesty along with Robinson's prophet-like boldness to point out culturally accepted leadership sins, are what make this book a valuable read for anyone in a position of authority.

Robinson explains that the higher one moves up in an organization, the easier (and even more expected) it is to distance themselves from the rest of the organization's staff. He sees this not only as detrimental to one's leadership ability (because you will lose the pulse of the organization), but also because it is not biblical—Jesus washed his disciples feet and spent hours dialoging with and training them. But Robinson doesn't stop there, he goes on to give specific examples of how he tries to step down from the pedestal and walk among his people. From not having a reserved parking spot to eating meals with students, Bill does all that he can, to make time and space for those relationships.

The content of the chapters not only describes Robinson's experiences, insights, and struggles, but also

grounds all of that in scriptural foundations. I really appreciated that Robinson did more than just take Christ as an ideal example for us to follow, but rather acknowledged the gospel is our only hope as leaders. Further Christ is Robinson's savior and companion, not just example, and his book helps us understand what that can look like in our leadership too.

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Each chapter ends with a series of questions that hold no bars. Even mid-chapter Robinson asks tough questions such as, "We need to ask ourselves the questions that curve us toward our people. How much time do we spend with them? Are we eager to be in their presence? Do we make warm inquiries about their lives? What does our 'me-them' conversational balance sheet look like? What opportunities are we missing simply to be in the presence

of those whom we hope will have confidence in our leadership? I fear too often we fail to look very far beyond ourselves and our to-do lists."

As Robinson explains in his book, Whitworth has been named a Best Christian Workplace a number of years. One of the key things that set them apart is that they were "engaging [their] employees in an environment of trust." Robinson explains that this environment of trust was directly linked to their commitment to openness. Although Robinson admits that there are some things that do need to remain private as they could hurt other people, he makes an effort to disclose more than most leaders do. He explains that a vacuum of information is dangerous because it allows for misunderstandings and secrecy divides.

All-in-all, Incarnate Leadership is a book that has much needed challenges for leaders and a message of hope in our savior who was and is the perfect leader. Although Bill Robinson is surely a sinner like us all, I appreciate his recognition of his weaknesses so that we can likewise admit our shortcomings and do all that we can to seek God's redeeming work in our life and especially our leadership.