

MISSIONAL RENAISSANCE

Changing the Scorecard for the CHURCH

Reggie McNeal (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009)

a book report by Jack De Vries



About the author:



Reggie McNeal serves as the Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network of Dallas, Texas. McNeal is the author of *A Word of Heart: Understanding How God*

Shapes Spiritual Leaders and the best-selling *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* and *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* from Jossey-Bass

You will either wholeheartedly embrace this latest book by Reggie McNeal or you will balk it. That is the nature of a renaissance. It divides. As Reggie admits: “The missional renaissance reflects the church’s response in a time of a remarkable manifestation of the kingdom. Those who miss it will find themselves on the other side of a divide

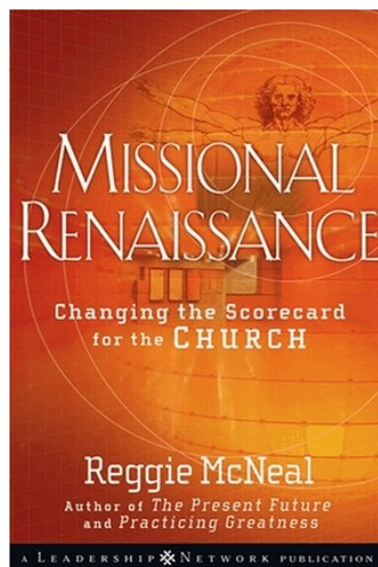
The missional church is the people of God partnering with God in his redemptive mission in the world.

that renders themselves irrelevant to the movement of God in the world. Those who engage it will find themselves at the intersection of God’s redemptive mission and the world he loves so much he was willing to die for it.” (17) As the subtitle

suggests, the missional renaissance changes the scorecard for the church. It shifts the way we evaluate the health of the church.

You might object to his either/or approach to assessing the church – but give Reggie a fair hearing. This book is packed full of practical suggestions on how to make a gospel impact in our world today. However, there is a warning to

picking up this book: “Be careful – once you start down this path, it will ruin you to the old world. You will be



The missional renaissance is altering both the character and the expression of the church in the world.

faced with choice after choice that will serve to declare your intentions about whether or not you will engage the missional renaissance.” (16)

What is meant by a missional renaissance? Reggie argues that when the church goes missional, it will require that you make three shifts, both in your thinking and in your behaviour: **(1)** from internal to external in terms of ministry focus; **(2)** from program development to people development in terms of core activity; and **(3)** from church-based to kingdom-based in terms of leadership agenda. A discussion of these three shifts with practical suggestions provides the framework for this book.

The first chapter, *The Missional Renaissance*, alone is worth purchasing this book. Reggie describes the confluence of three significant cultural phenomena which anticipates the three shifts that people and churches must make to engage the missional renaissance. These phenomena are:

- The emergence of the altruism economy
- The search for personal growth
- The hunger for spiritual vitality

The underlying premise of Reggie's observations is the belief that missions is primarily an action of God. He expands this idea in chapter two. He writes: "The missional church believes it is God who is on mission and that we are to join *him* in *it*." We are to do what Henry Blackaby suggests: find out what God is doing and join him in it. (23) In this we see the correlation between:

- the emergence of the altruism economy with the missional shift from an internal to an external focus
- the search for personal growth with the missional shift from program development to people development
- the hunger for spiritual vitality with the missional shift from church-based to kingdom-based leadership

The missional church is not a "what" but a "who".

The third through eighth chapters explore the three missional shifts in more detail. After describing each shift Reggie offers a scorecard that church leaders can use to assess how their churches are going. I

found the scorecards not only very practical but thought provoking. One of

***Find out what God is doing
and join him in it.***

Henry Blackaby

the questions churches often ask me is how can they become more missional in character. This is where the scorecards can be used to both stimulate thoughtful discussion, but also as gauges to assess how we are going.

The **first shift** is where people might have the greatest concern. It is the quandary people talk about as they do about the chicken and egg. Which comes first? Where should our focus as churches be: internal or external? Some might misunderstand Reggie to say that the internal is no longer important. But I don't believe this is what he is saying. It is not a question of *either/or* but *both/and*. The church is not an end in itself, but a means toward an end: the kingdom of God. As Reggie writes: "The church is wherever followers of Jesus are. People don't *go to* church; they *are* the church. They don't bring people to church; they bring church to people." (45) "Rather than looking at the kingdom through church lenses, the missional church looks at the church through kingdom lenses." (44) Having an external focus simply means that as churches we see missions as a way of life not just something we as churches do.

While some might take issue with the first missional shift, it is the **second shift** which resonates most with me. So keep reading

after you have plodded through the first four chapters. There is an awakening happening in churches all across the globe, not only in North America. Church leaders are waking to the reality that if we are not growing people then we are missing the boat. You can have all the programs in the world, but if people are not becoming more and more like Jesus – than what good are all the programs. “There is no necessary correlation between time logged sitting in pews and attaining godliness.” (100) Now Reggie admits that this second shift from program to people development is very difficult to address. “Maturation is messy. It takes time.” (100) In fact, people development is never done; it is ongoing. It is no wonder that this second shift is

The missional church is people; it's not a place where people congregate.

difficult. Not only do church leaders need to reorientate their program-focused minds; this work is never done!

The scorecard related to this second shift underscores how big this challenge is. For example, in a program-driven church the assessment centers on things like: number of people attending, people recruited for church services, church activities, money gathered and spent on church needs. Contrast this with the scorecard for a church which celebrates a people development culture: relationships that people are intentionally cultivating, people released into service, money spent on people rather than on buildings and administration, and the like.

As Reggie points out: “These are huge shifts.” (112) “Helping people get a life is the hardest work God does. That’s true for us as well.” (127) But chapter six is

A faith built on dead people doesn't thrive.

packed full of suggestions to help church leaders measure how their people are growing into Christian maturity.

The **third shift** is critical for church leadership in the 21st century. I found Reggie’s discussion of this shift, however, a bit laborious. But plug on – the concepts he discusses are so essential for the missional church. “The spirituality the world needs must be robust enough to engage people where they live, work, and play. This kingdom movement requires spiritual leaders who understand the culture’s search for God and who are willing to engage this discussion.” (14) Like the second shift, moving from church-based to kingdom-based leadership is personally challenging for church leaders. It “turns out to be a test of obedience, not just grasping a new idea. Are we giving the kind of leadership that turns people toward the mission of God?” (155)

Overall this book is an excellent read and anyone serious about leading the church ahead in God’s redemptive mission in the world will not only read it, but apply the lessons learned. “Missional church is not a fad, the next big thing. Missional thinking and living change the game completely.” (17) The game has begun. Let’s play!