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Radical Together

Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God

by David Platt (Multnomah: 2011)

A book review by Jack De Vries

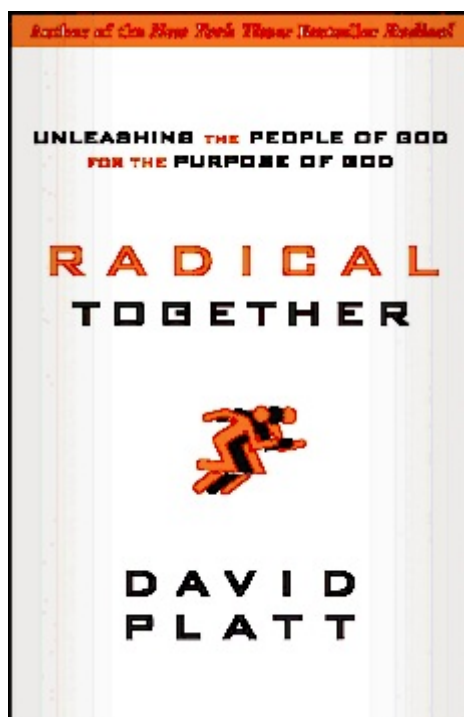
At times church leaders ring me up and want to know about good resources to raise up another generation of Christ followers. Pastors desire to equip the saints for the work of ministry and develop their leaders to do the same. Recently a pastor shared with me a resource that he is using with his elders to disciple them as leaders: *Radical Together* by David Platt. It came highly recommended. As soon as I picked up my own copy of this book and started to read it I understood why.

At the offset David Platt explains his purpose in writing this book: “In *Radical Together*, I want to consider what happens — or can happen — when we apply the revolutionary claims and commands of Christ to our communities of faith. I want to contemplate the force of a people who come together to enjoy God’s grace in the church while they extend God’s glory in the world.” (2) His aim was to answer this one questions: “How can we in the church best unleash the people of God in the Spirit of God with the

Word of God for the glory of God in the world?” (3) This already sparked my interest to keep reading.

In the body of the book Platt unpacks six ideas, which according to him, work out the implications of the gospel. These six ideas:

1. One of the worst enemies of Christians can be good things in the church;
 2. The gospel that saves us from work saves us to work;
 3. The Word does the work;
 4. Building the right church depends on using all the wrong people;
 5. We are living — and longing — for the end of the world; and
 6. We are selfless followers of a self-centered God.
- (3) As Platt admits, “my aim is to put forward ideas that at first may seem confusing, if not contradictory, but upon deeper investigation will bring to light important realities that most overlook.” (4)



Does Platt hit the target on his aim for this book? I believe he does. For example, we all know that in churches we do a lot of good things. Yet, as Platt points out: “we spend our lives doing good things in the church while we ultimately miss out on the great purpose for which we were created.” (8) When I coach pastors and churches I often urge them to put everything on the chopping block. Some good things we do in churches contribute very little, if anything, to the fundamental calling God has given us as Christians. We ought to let those things go. Platt puts it like this: “A church is a community

of individuals who have lost their lives to Christ. Surely it flows from this that we would be willing to lose our programs and our preferences, to sacrifice our budgets and our buildings, to let go of our most cherished legacies and reputations if there is a better way to make his glory known in the world.” (10) And I agree. In my work among the Reformed churches in Australia we have agreed to be *a church reforming to reach the lost for Christ*. This simply means that we, in principle, are willing to let go of whatever hinders us from reaching the lost for Christ. Sounds easy in principle; it is much harder in practice.

While I agree with Platt, that “if we want to unleash the people of God in the church for the glory of God in the world, we need to let go of some good things,” (23) his illustrations in this first chapter appear to suggest that *the key good thing we need to let go of is money or our church budgets*.

Platt does make the point at the end of the chapter that the good things we need to put on the table are things like “every program we’ve created, every position we’ve established, every innovation we’ve adopted, every building we’ve assembled, and every activity we’ve organized.” (23) This first chapter could be improved with stories that illustrate the above good things.

Platt’s second chapter alone is worth the price of the book. Within the evangelical world many Christians misunderstand the nature of the gospel in relation to good works. We are saved not by our good works. The gospel is clear about that. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8,9) But the gospel is also about bearing fruit: “Real faith always creates fruit.” (29) As Paul goes on in his letter to the Ephesians: “We are ... created in Christ Jesus

to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (2:10) Platt writes: “Any low-grade sense of guilt gets conquered by a high-grade sense of gospel that compels a willing, urgent, joyful, uncompromising, grace-saturated, God-glorifying obedience in us.” (31) “When the gospel of God is clear in the church, Christians will work hard by the grace of God with great delight for the glory of God.” (37) We are saved to work. As churches we need to get this balance into our understanding of the gospel so that we will more and more produce the fruit of gospel among us.

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Another corrective needed in our churches today is the understanding that this fruitfulness in and through the church results from Christians being immersed in the Word of God. “The Word of God accomplishes the work of God.... When we unchain the power of God’s Word in the church, it will unleash the potential of God’s people in the world.” (45-46) Some churches today are realising this truth as they simply get people back to reading their Bibles, studying God’s Word, and hearing sermons based on Scripture. It is true: “[The Word] forms and fulfills, motivates and mobilizes, equips and empowers, leads and directs the people of God in the church for the plan of God in the world.” (54)

The fourth idea in *Radical Together* is an idea that I have been passionate about almost my entire ministry: discipleship. I keep wondering what it will take for churches and Christians to get serious about discipleship. As Platt emphasizes: “The goal of the church is never for one person to be equipped and empowered to lead as many people as possible to Christ. The goal is always for all of God’s people to be equipped and empowered to lead as many people as possible to Christ.” (57) Jesus’ command is our commission: make disciples. “Don’t build extravagant

places; build extraordinary people. Make disciples who will make disciples who will make disciples, and together multiply this gospel to all peoples. This was the simple command that was to drive the church.” (73) Yes, a simple command, but yet so few churches and Christians take discipleship seriously. Every session or church board would benefit from reading this chapter and having a healthy discussion how to implement this simple command of Jesus in our churches.

In the last two chapters Platt underscores the mission God has given us: “Our mission is not only about loving our city or invading our culture with the gospel. Our mission is also about leaving our cities to infiltrate every culture with the gospel.” (87) Platt is passionate about this, not just in theory, also in practice. The personal stories he shares throughout this book give clear evidence of this. And to put everything into proper perspective, Platt ends *Radical Together* by reminding us that our self-existent, self-sustaining, and self-sufficient God does not need us. He doesn’t need me, nor my church, nor you, nor your church. “God does not need our conferences, conventions, plans, programs, budgets, buildings, or mission agencies.... God does not involve us in his grand, global purpose because he needs us. He involves us in his grand, global purpose because he loves us.” (122-123) This is humbling, but also liberating! A needed reminder for all.

Radical Together also includes a helpful discussion guide at the end of the book. This very readable (and not long) book lends itself as a very useful resource for church leaders, sessions, and/or boards to work through. Simply assign a chapter and then when you next come together, discuss the guide at the back of book. Don’t skip the brainstorm sessions at the end of each lesson. Discuss

how to put the ideas of this book into practice. This might sound radical, but I am convinced that if you were to do this together with others, the people of God will be unleashed for the purpose of God all to the glory of God. And when you do this, drop me a line to tell me the stories of how your people are being unleashed! Let us encourage one another, and all the more as we near the Day of our Lord’s return. (Hebrews 10:25)

YOU HAVE

*the Word of God before you,
the Spirit of God in you,
and
the command of God to you:
make disciples of all nations.*

About the Author:



David Platt is pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*. A well-known Bible expositor, David holds three advanced degrees, including a doctorate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Heather, live in Birmingham with their children.