

THE LEADER'S EDGE

*“Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.”
(Proverbs 9:9)*

Category:

Growing Leaders
Holistic Spiritual Formation

Rating:

Content: A-
Style: B+

Memorable Quotes:

“We need true worship to clarify true danger. We need to meet God in order to know what’s worth fearing and what’s not.”

“The real danger is not that we pursue relevance too much but too little: it’s too much about our culture and too little about God.”

“The question of many secular people is not, ‘Why doesn’t church look more like us?’ Rather, their perceptive question (and God’s too) is, ‘Why doesn’t the church look more like Jesus?’”

“God’s saving grace to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came in the midst of Babylon, a place least likely to see Yahweh. In a foreign setting these three exiles practiced lives of daily worship—the most life-changing and subversive thing they could do as strangers in a strange land. As we read Daniel 1, they remembered by what they ate that though they lived in Nebuchadnezzar’s house, they belonged to Yahweh.”

BOOK SUMMARY

The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice, by, Mark Labberton, Abingdon Press, 2007.

Core Content

Mark Labberton serves as the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Berkley, California. Mark blends together the voice of a prophet with the heart of a pastor as he integrates holistic worship with God’s call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly. He contends that many churches have fought worship wars over petty personal preferences while neglecting the larger concerns of living out the compassion of Christ to the marginalized people of our world.

Here are some of the major insights the author presents in this provocative book:

1. What’s at Stake in Worship?

Labberton’s answer is—everything! Authentic worship redefines reality from God’s point of view and must result in actions which reflect the character of God.

2. The Real Battle over Worship

The danger in worship in many North American churches today is that we fixate on ourselves and lose sight of our neighbour. Biblically speaking, we can never separate loving God from loving others.

3. False Dangers

Too many of our worship services are tame and tepid, as we attempt to domesticate God. Drawing on the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Labberton points out the capacity of these young Hebrews to distinguish between true and false danger. The greatest danger was not the fire but idolatry. True worship enables us to unhook from the mesmerizing values of safety, comfort and consumerism.

The author identifies the following “**False Dangers**”:

- Worship That’s Not Under Control
- Worship That Doesn’t Seem Relevant
- Worship That Doesn’t Meet Expectations
- Worship That Isn’t Popular
- Worship That isn’t Comfortable

4. Real Dangers

Holistic worship enables us to perceive the following “**Real Dangers**”:

- Encountering God
- Worship That Lies to God

“The personal love of God is like an equation that works one way better than the other: God loves the whole world, and that encompasses loving us individually. He doesn’t love us individually until he ends up loving everyone. The difference is significant because the second order shows the influence of out individualistic [North] American subculture instead of the God who made heaven and earth.”

“Sabbath-keeping can unhook us from the appetite-driven and production-driven machine of our culture. It helps us discover the liberty of saying no in order to say yes. . . . No to busyness. No to unnecessary consumption. No to 24-7 productivity. No to media. Yes to God. Yes to worship. Yes to community. Yes to justice.”

“We are for the most part indistinguishable from the culture around us. We have decided to enjoy our Babylon while nodding occasionally to the God we say we worship. The life of the [North] American church provides a type of religious window dressing for our culture. We just seek our own welfare and call it God’s blessing.”

“The measure of our worship is the fruit of character and action that looks more and more like the character and action of God.”

“That’s the basic premise of our incarnational calling. It’s about entering, engaging, acting on the behalf of

- Worship That Lies About God
- Worship That Doesn’t Change Us
- Worship That Doesn’t Change the World

5. *Waking Up to Where We Live*

The gospel radically changes our address. Jesus recontextualizes where we live. God alters our spiritual habitat. Christians live in God in community with our brothers and sisters in Christ for the sake of the unbelieving world. Living obedient lives requires that we choose to operate in this new realm and allow our solidarity with all God’s creatures to move us to do justice.

6. *Doing Justice Starts with Rest*

Practicing Sabbath allows us to say no to the life-draining rhythms of our culture and to say yes to God and his redemptive agenda. As mission-driven activists, Sabbath forces us to acknowledge that, ultimately, serving the marginalized is God’s work. Out of a sense of deep rest and dependence, we are freed to join God in his mission of caring for the forgotten members of society.

7. *When Worship Talks to Power*

At the root of injustice is the abuse of power. True worship entails the realignment of power. In the context of communion with God we are reminded that the greatest power in the universe is the sacrificial love of God in Christ crucified. The author describes how the various elements of a worship service (Call to Worship, Prayer, Confession, Preaching, the Lord’s Supper, etc.) can be used to reaffirm God’s supreme authority.

8. *Dwelling in Exodus or in Exile*

Labberton calls North American Christians to embrace their God-given role as exiles and strangers in our own contemporary Babylon. We must be defined by the cross, not our culture. As the prophet declared, we must seek the shalom of the city where God has sent us, for in its shalom we find our shalom (Jeremiah 29:7). As modern-day Daniels we are called to reflect the counter-cultural characteristics of Yahweh in a foreign land while compassionately ministering to its needy citizens.

9. *An Imagination for Justice*

We need a calibre of worship which enlarges our spiritual imagination and deepens our theological reflection of what it means to seek justice in the 21st century. The author elaborates ways this can be accomplished through such things as prayer, reading Scripture for the sake of other people, being mentored by people with a broader vision than our own, and giving love away.

10. *Living Awake*

Throughout his book, Labberton mourns over the sluggish, sleep-like apathy of the North American church. In this final chapter he issues a strong call to awaken to God’s call to do justice by doing four things:

- Choosing to Live out Our Worship
- Choosing to See

<p><i>someone else's reality as though it were your own. In Christ it is our own."</i></p> <p><i>"Love has been so sentimentalized in our culture that putting love and justice together in the same sentence sounds as dissonant as joining worship and justice. Yet all these things are intertwined in the character of God, none separable from the others."</i></p>	<p>We must live in our own communities in ways that reflect seeing with global perspective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Choosing to Engage <p>We must address injustice on both a macro/corporate level as well as a micro/personal level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Choosing to Love
	<p>Discussion Starters</p> <p>This book includes a Study Guide which offers questions to spark group discussion.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What connections do you see in your own life between holistic worship and doing justice? How could these two realities be blended better in the life of your church? 2. What would unhooking from the values of our culture entail for you? How could you guide others in your congregation to follow your example? 3. At a leadership retreat, the author asked each of his elders to share a major "soap box" issue in their life. This led to some lively discussion and practical ministry. Is this an idea you might want to experiment with?