

Helland, Roger and Leonard Hjalmarson. *Missional Spirituality: Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011. Paperback. 253 pp. ISBN 0830838073

Review by John Koeshall\*

Roger Helland and Lenoard Hjalmarson offer a very readable book, chock-full of stories, pithy quotes and insightful theories resulting from their varied experiences and friends, centered around defining a spirituality that is missional. The ten chapters are roughly divided into a theological and a practical section. The authors begin with a theological framework (chapters 1-4) that explores an “overview of challenges to a missional spirituality,” including four theological foundations that lay the groundwork for the practical application in the second section of the book.

The authors argue for the restoration of the church to its “central place of authority and influence” in our Western world that is transitioning into post-Christendom (51), and address many important questions facing pastors: How do we define spiritual maturity? Are our program driven-churches simply “artifacts of temple spirituality?” (51) How can we as pastors lead churches that practice all the gifts of the Spirit for ministry and mission rather than see the pastoral role morph into that of a manager?

An important aspect of the book is the tracing of missional spirituality in action (Ch. 4) from the early church: “Paul never planted a church. He planted the gospel. Churches then emerged as the fruit of that seed sowing” (77). Moving ahead sixteen centuries to the Pietistic era of Spener, Arndt and Francke, we are introduced to the Moravians who found refuge under Zinzendorf and became the first large scale Protestant missionary movement. They in turn influenced the Wesleys and ultimately the Wesleyan-Holiness revival. Helland and Hjalmarson conclude that “both the early church and classic Pietism contained the essential theology and practices for a fruitful missional spirituality in action” (90). Twentieth Century Pentecostalism can trace part of its roots to this revival as well.

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The practical framework section (Chapters 5-9) draws elements of the Great Commandment to love the Lord our God and express His love “from the inside out” (32). The authors stress the fact that missional spirituality in action must be thought of in communal terms. We are like a stone in a mosaic; all of the stones together reveal the face of God to the world. As an example of this, the authors share the story of a police chief of a Denver suburb who offers an eye opening statement: “80 percent of the calls we receive, people do not need a uniformed officer; they need a neighbor” (176). This radical statement about community challenges each of us to think about its application. “Many groups try to build community around their strengths and special events. It seldom works,” the authors claim. “Community—real life together—is built around shared weakness” (184). Everything about community poses a risk, especially at the beginning. Offering a place of openness, honesty, intimacy, and refuge requires sacrifice and inconvenience. As love replaces power, trust and openness destroy barriers. “When we invite others into this space, they flock to come home” (184).

Finally, a fitting concluding chapter is entitled ‘The Gospel According to You.’ It calls us, like the ancient Celts, to a spiritual life that is “inward in love and outward in mission.” We must make the effort of exegeting our culture, learning to define reality like the men of Issachar (I Chron. 12:32) and interpret the signs of the times (Matt. 16:1-3). I see this book as being written primarily for pastors and church leaders as we seek to be a missionary people living out in our communities and workplaces “an incarnational missional spirituality” (194). “Missional living is about spirituality and discipleship before it’s about church strategy or structure” (195). This chapter suggests a list of ten trends as examples to be exegeted and interpreted theologically to be effective missionaries in our communities. An example is: “Fixation on fitness, diet, alternative therapies, beauty, youthfulness” (200).

Each chapter closes with further study helps meant to guide small groups and congregations to understand and employ missions beyond their institutional walls. The book concludes with two very useful appendices on how to equip our churches. Also included are 19 pages of detailed endnotes. However, a bibliography and an author and subject index would have been appreciated.

In addition, the authors present five practices that we can engage to form our character and conduct toward love for God and our neighbor. Missional spirituality is about “enlarging the size of our hearts” (95); through the practices of theology, our hearts and souls are united with Christ in obedience and humility.

Excellent thoughts from many authors are brought together within the text to enrich the contents of each chapter. Quotes worth remembering include: “If you rely on training, you accomplish what training can do. If you rely on skills and hard work, you obtain the results that skills and hard, faithful work can do. When you rely on committees, you get what committees can do. But when you rely on God, you get what God can do” (97). “We can’t entertain people into discipleship” (45).

Finally, be sure and turn to page 63 for the answer to the question: “What do you think a missional Christian (or a royal priest) looks like?” This of course means you will have to borrow or better yet, purchase the book and allow it to impact your life.