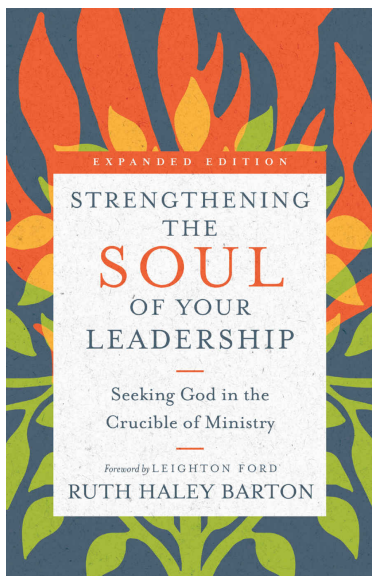


Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry.

By Ruth Haley Barton

IVP Book, 2018, 246 Pages

Summary



Ruth Haley Barton weaves together topics that her previous writings address with a focus on application for leaders. It ranges from leadership disciplines, such as solitude and silence before the Lord, how leaders should think about the community they lead, and how spiritual leadership is unique. Each chapter ends with an applicational section suitable for self-guided spiritual retreats as well as a group guide for teams to work through.

Best illustration

The overriding Biblical story the author uses to highlight her points are taken from the leadership of Moses. This story illustrates points made in almost every chapter and provides the Biblical basis for leadership that emanates from a healthy soul.

Best Idea

Haley Barton stresses the importance of solitude for leaders. Without solitude we reflexively cast our struggles onto others, conditions in ministry, or simply fail to see the truth of our lives. "Amid the welter of possible distractions, leaders need time in solitude so that we can notice those things we would otherwise miss due to the pace and complexity of our lives." Kindle location 864

Best Take Away

In Chapter 1 the author warns us that leaders can pursue the mission of a ministry while simultaneously losing their spiritual vitality. She states that we need to ask leaders, "How is it with your soul?" as both a diagnostic and a reminder that spiritual leadership comes from deep within us. Every leader benefits from the daily reminder that ministry can be a job without careful attention to its spiritual qualities.

Our Recommendation

There are many resources on leadership but precious few that emphasize spiritual leadership. This book is unique not in the topics it addresses, which Ruth Haley Barton has written about in similar fashion before, but in the way she brings these ideas to bear on leadership. This is a book to be read slowly and with special attention given to application and thoughtful reflection, appropriate for both individual and group study.

Best Quotes

“Jesus indicates that it is possible to gain the whole world but lose your own soul. If he were talking to us as Christian leaders today, he might point out that it is possible to gain the world of ministry success and lose your own soul in the midst of it all.” Kindle location 85

“If Jesus were speaking to us today, he might also point out that when leaders lose their souls, so do the churches and organizations they lead.” Kindle location 88

“there has to be more to life in leadership than many of us are experiencing.” Kindle location 105

“Spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives and for the sake of others.” Kindle location 129

“In the process of transformation the Spirit of God moves us from behaviors motivated by fear and self- protection to trust and abandonment to God; from selfishness and self-absorption to freely offering the gifts of the authentic self; from the ego’s desperate attempts to control the outcomes of our lives to an ability to give ourselves over to the will of God which is often the foolishness of this world.” Kindle location 134

“The soul-full leader is faithful to the one thing he can do—create the conditions that set us up for an encounter with God in the places where we need it most. To continually seek God in the crucible of ministry no matter how hard it gets.” Kindle location 147

“Such moments come to all of us—moments when our leadership feels like something we ‘put on’ like a piece of clothing pulled out of the closet for a particular occasion rather than something that flows from a deep inner well fed by a pure source.” Kindle location 223

“When the early Wesleyan bands of Christ-followers got together in small group meetings, their first question to each other was “How is it with your soul?” This is the best possible question for us as Christian leaders in light of Jesus’ warning and in light of what we witness in and around us.” Kindle location 253

“What would it look like for me to lead more consistently from my soul—the place of my own encounter with God—rather than leading primarily from my head, my unbridled activism, or my performance- oriented drivenness? What would it be like to find God in the context of my leadership rather than miss God in the context of my leadership?” Kindle location 267

“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy. It knows how to survive in hard places. But it is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the

dense underbrush. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out." Kindle location 279

"The only way to begin facing these challenges is to keep seeking tenaciously after God through spiritual disciplines that keep us grounded in the presence of God at the center of our being." Kindle location 320

"He lasted because he allowed his leadership challenges to catalyze and draw him into a level of reliance on God that he might not have pursued had it not been for his great need for God which he experienced most profoundly in the crucible of leadership. He literally had no place else to go!" Kindle location 359

"The discipline of solitude is a key discipline for all those who seek after God." Kindle location 370

"One of the reasons solitude is so challenging for leaders is that the activities and experiences associated with leadership can be very addicting." Kindle location 372

"Many leaders preach solitude better than they practice it, and I suspect that this may be the heart of the matter." Kindle location 377

"what lies beneath the surface—of the ocean or our lives—really matters." Kindle location 487

"to try to press on without paying attention to whatever it is that is bubbling up from way down deep is the most dangerous thing we could do." Kindle location 508

"Solitude will do its good work whether we know what we are doing or not." Kindle location 522

"All of us have need of this kind of homecoming in which we claim our experiences as our own and acknowledge the ways they have shaped us." Kindle location 613

"When we are in the company of others, it is easy to project our fears and negative feelings onto them; when we are in solitude, we must claim these inner experiences as our own." Kindle location 678

"We slide inexorably into a way of life that offers little or no opportunity for paying attention and then wonder why we are not hearing from God when we need God most." Kindle location 837

"All of us have burning bushes in our lives, places that shimmer with grace, alerting us to the possibility that God is at work doing something that we could not have predicted." Kindle location 869

"One of the most soul-strengthening things that can happen to a leader in the crucible of ministry is to know that God is at work, to hear a Voice speaking that is not our own." Kindle location 972

"Our transformation is never for ourselves alone. It is always for the sake of others." Kindle location 1,032

"The soul of leadership begins with who we are—really. Not who we think we are, not who we would like to be, not who others believe us to be." Kindle location 1,064

"Leadership will not help us escape ourselves—it will only bring who we are into bolder relief!" Kindle location 1,079

"Solitude, then, is that place where we fight it out with God if we need to—all the way down to the mat." Kindle location 1,164

"Moses' faithfulness to his own spiritual journey was the best possible preparation for leading the Israelites out of their long bondage and into the freedom that God had for them." Kindle location 1,251

"Eventually something happens that heightens our awareness that our heart is longing for something more." Kindle location 1,293

"Have I learned enough about how to wait on God in my own life to be able to call others to wait when that is what's truly needed? Have I done enough spiritual journeying to lead people on this part of their journey?" Kindle location 1,448

"Oh how subtle are the inner dynamics that allow us to become caught in a pace of life that is unlivable! And oh how desperately we need a Jethro in our lives to point out that there is another way." Kindle location 1,500

"It is a very humbling moment in the life of a leader when we realize that we have taken on too much." Kindle location 1,510

"As he matured, he revealed a very personal understanding that his deep struggle with a thorn in the flesh was a gift that was given to him to limit his own grandiosity and keep him in touch with his humanness." Kindle location 1,609

"Since our churches have taken on many of the characteristics of bureaucracies, it is not surprising that clergy are sometimes rewarded, not punished for their narcissistic behaviors." Kindle location 1,640

"Everywhere I travel these days, those who are involved in church work and parachurch ministry report that they are exhausted in ministry and have despaired of finding a way of life that works." Kindle location 1,767

"Cultures that encourage people to seek intermittent renewal not only inspire greater commitment, but also greater productivity." Kindle location 1,817

"For a community to begin living within limits, there must be a willingness to name current reality, to envision a healthier reality and then to make plans that will take the community from one to the other." Kindle location 1,931

"Intercessory prayer is more about not knowing than it is about knowing. It is about growing more and more comfortable with the truth of Romans 8—that I do not know

how to pray as I ought, for myself or anyone else, and accepting the fact that the Holy Spirit is the one who really knows how to pray and is already interceding for that person or that situation before the throne of grace." Kindle location 2,219

"Leadership involves a very peculiar kind of loneliness. It has to do with seeing something that others do not see, do not see as clearly or perhaps have lost sight of." Kindle location 2,339

"Moses was experiencing one of the great paradoxes of leadership: that we can be surrounded by people and be very busy doing good things and yet feel deeply alone with the burdens we bear." Kindle location 2,582

"It is much easier to talk about community, and even try to create community for others, than it is to actually live it at the leadership level." Kindle location 2,662

"When we refuse to live within our limits (one of my deepest temptations), we wear out ourselves and those who lead with us." Kindle location 2,777

"For Christian people, unity is not just one good priority among many. It seemed to be all Jesus wanted as everything else fell away and he faced his death." Kindle location 2,843

"We Protestant Christians do not have a context for this kind of commitment to stability. We shop for community the way we shop for a new house or a new car, and "picking a community and staying with it" goes completely against our consumer mindset." Kindle location 2,853

"At the heart of spiritual leadership and spiritual journeying is discernment—the capacity to recognize and respond to the presence and the activity of God both personally and in community." Kindle location 2,941

"The practice of leadership discernment, like any other Christian discipline, is a means of creating space for God's activity in our lives." Kindle location 2,973

"Discernment with others at the leadership level requires an extraordinary amount of safety in each other's presence, along with great clarity about what values govern the process." Kindle location 3,063

"Is it possible to get to a place where we are so given over to God that physical death is just one more step toward the intimacy and union we seek?" Kindle location 3,299