

Rock Solid

The Priority of the Soul in The Life of a Leader

If you've been at the leadership task for any length of time, you realize more and more that leaders ultimately lead with their lives. The undeniable pattern is inside out. God works IN you and then He works THROUGH you.

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Knowing this to be true, a leader is constantly on the prowl for insight and wisdom from others who are further down the road. To that end, let me introduce you to a book that I find myself repeatedly recommending to my friends and colleagues: *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, authored by Ruth Haley Barton, founding president of the Transformation Center.

If you have but an ounce of interest in the INTERIOR life of a leader, this is a “must read”. It is basic training. Boot camp. Leadership 101.

Throughout the pages, Barton consistently rolls out seasoned words of wisdom and challenge to those whose souls are starved for something different, something better, something deeper. Let me whet your appetite for the book, but more than that, let me relay some of her words that I trust will speak to the core of who you are as a leader.

Words that speak to the TENSION that every leader feels...

These days (and maybe every day) there is a real tension between what the human soul needs in order to be truly well and what life in leadership encourages and even requires. There is the tension between being and doing, community and cause, truth-telling and putting the right spin on things. There is the tension between the time it takes to love people and the need for expediency. There is the tension between the need for measurable goals and the difficulty of measuring that which is ultimately immeasurable by anyone but God himself.

Words that speak to the PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY of being a leader...

But one of the things I know for sure is that those who are looking to us for spiritual sustenance need us first and foremost to be spiritual seekers ourselves. They need us to keep searching for the bread of life that feeds our own souls so that we can guide them to places of sustenance for their own souls. Then rather than offering the cold stone of past devotionals, regurgitated apologetics or someone else's musings about the spiritual life, we will have bread to offer that is warm from the oven of our intimacy with God.

Words that speak to the needed ALERTNESS to the life of a leader...

For a leader to take time to turn aside and look is no small thing. In the rush of normal life, we often blow

right past the place where God is creating a stir to get our attention. But at the heart of spiritual leadership is the capacity to notice the activity of God so we can join him in it. Amid the welter of possible distractions, an essential discipline for leaders is to craft times of quiet in which we allow God to show us those things that we might otherwise miss.

Words that speak to the PERSONAL JOURNEY of a leader...

What kind of leader is able to call people to wait on God in the face of real threat, when all of their survival instincts are raging? What inner strength does a leader need to be able to access in order to stay calm, to quiet the primal instincts of others, and to create space for turning to God in the midst of such fierce human reactivity? Only a leader who has waited for God in the darkest moments of his own deep need. Only a leader who has stood still and waited for God's deliverance in the places where she feared for her very life. Only the leader with inner spiritual authority that comes from his own waiting can ask others to do the same.

And words that speak to the SOUL of a leader...

Strengthening the soul of our leadership is an invitation that begins, continues and ends with seeking God in the crucible of ministry. It is an invitation to stay connected with our own soul—that very private place where God's Spirit and my spirit dwell together in union—and to lead from that place. The choice to lead from our soul is a vulnerable approach to leadership, because the soul is more tender than the mind or the ego. This is a place where we don't have all the answers—or at least not necessarily when everybody wants them! It is a place where we are not in control; God is. It is a place where the quickest way is not always the best way, because the transformation that is happening in us is more important than getting where we think we need to go.

As I read those words, my heart is quieted. The longer I linger in Barton's reflections, the more I resist a skill-based, tips-and-techniques approach to leadership, and the more I embrace leadership that emerges deep within me where the Master Craftsman does His handiwork of soul transformation.

What does inside-out leadership look like in your life?