# A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders

In his thought-provoking, must-read book *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*, consultant and missional-expert Reggie McNeal coalesces his thesis with these words: *No long-term spiritual gains can be posted unless they show up in the box scores of the leader's own heart development.* From there he traces the heart-shaping process of leader development, calling out six specific arenas: culture, call, community, communion, conflict, and the commonplace.

Check out these Book Notes to get a glimpse of the wisdom that is stored up in the pages of this reflective book.

Title: **A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders**

Author: **Reggie McNeal**

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**Book Description:**

In *A Work of Heart,* bestselling author and missional expert Reggie McNeal helps leaders reflect on the ways in which God is shaping them by letting us see God at work in the lives of four quintessential biblical leaders: Moses, David, Jesus, and Paul. McNeal identifies the formative influences upon these leaders, which he sees as God's ways of working in their lives: the same influences at work today forming leaders for ministry in our times. He explores the shaping influence of culture, call, community, conflict, and the commonplace.

**Book Quotes:**

The lesson: when a leader loses heart, he loses. (ix)

The truth frequently goes unrehearsed, which is that great spiritual leaders are great not just because they are great leaders but because they are great *spiritual* leaders. (x)

No long-term spiritual gains can be posted unless they show up in the box scores of the leader's own heart development. (xi)

Basic heart-shaping occurs in six significant arenas. These divine-human interchanges provide the six major subplots of the leader's heart-shaping process. The development and convergence of these story lines script the leader's life message. These six subplots are *culture, call, community, communion, conflict*, and the *commonplace*. (xii)

With all of the options available to him, why has he chosen to work through leaders in spiritual enterprises? The answer may at first seem too simple, but it is the best answer I can offer: God creates leaders in order to share his heart with his people. (xiv)

The leaders who grow through conflict learn to reflect on their own actions. They take responsibility for their contribution to the situation. In doing so, they allow God to carry on his heart-shaping activity in the pressure cooker of conflict. Maturity begins to be in evidence when leaders who find themselves arrayed against the enemies of God worry more for God's reputation than for their own. (15-16)

Some spiritual leaders have not developed the shepherd's heart of sacrifice for their people. (17)

Spiritual leaders who are fairly intact in their self-esteem can build community. They breed health in their relationships because they themselves possess psychological health. The opposite is also true; dysfunction breeds dysfunction. (30)

Insecure leaders make supporting them a litmus test of their followers' devotion to God. (30)

So many things vie for the leader's attention. To the degree that Christian leaders nurture their communion with God, they keep sight of the best contributions they can make. If the communion suffers, the mission of the leader is placed in jeopardy, in danger of being lost to trivialities or distraction. (32)

The leader's sense of mission is not a matter of pride. It is a point of privilege and responsibility. If the leader's heart remains in communion with God, then humility graces the leader's life. The leader maintains an absolute awareness of owing the leadership role to God. The leader is king by design and pleasure of the Almighty. (32)

The capacity to see God at work in the common things of life is a hallmark of great spiritual leadership. (34)

The ultimate responsibility of the spiritual leader is to share the heart of God with the people of God. (34)

God uses a preparation model for developing leaders, not a planning model. Leaders who give their best efforts to their current assignments from God are prepared for their next level of influence. Those who plan their ministries in advance often get where they want to go, but along the way they lose the anointing that comes only with radical obedience and trusting in God to fulfill the dreams he gives. Leaders of great legacy look back over their lives and see that in every ministry assignment, God was preparing them for the next. Trusting God with their destiny, they wound up with influence they never could have pulled off on their own. (45)

Sometimes people who try to live out great dreams, convinced of significant calls on their lives, stumble out of the starting block, tripping over the fundamental deficiency. A lack of people skills can be overcome, but not without acute awareness and accountability to a relationship skills coach. (56)

The great temptation and debilitator for many Christian ministers is not moral failure, but compass failure. With no clear call signal constantly guiding them, they dissipate their energies in lots of activity that does not further the missional agenda of their call from God. (60)

God shapes the leader's heart in order to amplify his own heart through the leader. Once captured by God's heart, the leader is positioned to share God's heart with God's people. (75)

Leaders with the courage and commitment to engage culture want to be culturally relevant. They hold this ambition not for relevancy's sake, but in order to establish and maintain a credible dialogue and connection with those inside and outside the faith. (78)

Having a position or title no longer guarantees that people automatically afford leadership to the person in that position. Leadership must now be earned; it is no longer bestowed. (83)

Creating both community and space for people to experience genuine spiritual formation will require an act of

courage on the part of spiritual leaders. It will involve significant shifts in the way we currently keep score in churches. We have worked hard to produce church members who show up at the church to demonstrate their loyalty to the church. In the future, less will be more, but it will look like less to those accustomed to keeping box scores measuring the amount of activity at the church. (85)

God shapes the heart of the leader through the call. This call is a divinely orchestrated setting apart of the leader for some special task. God's part of the call dynamic is to initiate, guide, position, and intervene. The leader's part of the call drama is to hear, respond, search, and order or re-order life. (95)

The call comes out of who we are as well as shaping who we are. (95)

Those who describe themselves as called mean that they have made a commitment of life into God's service, to be at his disposal, to be in his employ for the efforts of accomplishing his agenda. (95)

Spiritual leaders, on the other hand, describe their whole lives in terms of the call. It involves much more than a vocational expression or function. It goes to the very core of one's being. It is pivotal and life-defining decision. (95)

Leaders convinced of their call do not easily succumb to disappointments and discouragements. Nor do they calculate odds in the same way as those who are not operating from a call basis. Leaders secure in their call will charge hell with a water pistol. A divine unction fuels their determination. (96)

It is God's call. It is his decision. It involves a sovereign selection. Certainly you can run from the call and even refuse it. Some have! But you cannot drum it up. Nor should you try. The call is not invented; it is revealed. (99)

The call will no longer automatically command the respect it once did in the church culture. It will involve more than service; it will exact a sacrifice. The call of God in the days ahead will not grant a person automatic privilege or power but rather potential persecution and certain pain. (99)

In one conflict episode recorded in the book of Acts, the detractors of the early apostles took note that Peter and John had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). This association set early Christian leaders apart for their assignment. New apostolic leaders bear a striking resemblance to these early leaders of the movement. They possess a spiritual presence and energy that is

unmistakably that of Jesus. They evidence a personal relationship with him that goes well beyond the capacity for rendering textual exposition about him. To borrow an apostle's phrase, they know him. They love Jesus and are sold on his agenda. Their enthusiasm for him invites others to make the same commitment. (105)

There is an Audience of One that the Christian leader must cultivate. Only his approval assuages insignificance and loneliness and feelings of failure. Only he keeps perfect score. He is the One who has issued the call and convened the games. He is the one who will judge the efforts and award the medals. His is the only vote that counts, no matter how many seem lined up either for or against you. His "well done" will make every effort worth doing again. (113)

Leaders are not shaped in isolation. Leaders are shaped *in* community. And they are shaped *by* community. Leaders cannot be separated from the formative processes of community. Despite any claims to the contrary, leaders are not self-made people. There is no such person. (115)

Putting off Sabbath means putting off life. Without Sabbath, our souls lose touch with our true destiny. Life becomes too common and profane. Transcendence is lost. The tyranny of the urgent rules our lives. We forget what it is really real. We neglect the kingdom. We fail to rehearse for eternity. (143)

Great spiritual leaders are great spiritual leaders because they enjoy exceptional communion with God. The failure to establish intimacy with the Almighty imposes a limit on genuine spiritual leadership. No amount of giftedness or skill will make unnecessary the development of this arena. (150)

You are a work-in progress, a work of God's heart, a masterpiece of divine heart-sculpting efforts. (152)

Leaders in touch with heaven can move earth. (153)

One of the best strategies for letting conflict work for you involves coming out of denial and coming to grips with the reality that challenges go with the territory of leadership. (156)

If you want to emerge better through conflict, go ahead and die. Die to expectations that everyone will love you. Die to getting a pass on being mistreated and persecuted. Then get over it with resurrection power, and live a truly free and powerful life, having already counted yourself as dead. (157)

The discussion of the commonplace as a heart-shaping dynamic for spiritual leaders now focuses on you. The goal of this treatment is to raise your awareness of the sacredness of the ordinary. (178)

Leaders whose hearts are shaped through the commonplace have trained themselves to look for God . . . everywhere. God uses circumstances to train our hearts. We tend to disregard circumstances, particularly challenging ones, as nuisances to overcome or to avoid. This attitude will keep us in the dark as to much of what God is trying to teach us through the circumstances of our lives. (179)

There are no small obediences. Every yes further ingrains the heart with the character of Jesus. (185)