
BOOK REVIEW*LIVING AT THE NEXT LEVEL: LEADER'S EDITION*

BY: COURTNEY MCBATH

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Materialism is embedded within the culture of Evangelical Christianity. In many Evangelical churches across the United States, discipleship is synonymous with the American dream. In his book *Living at the Next Level: The Leaders Edition*, Courtney McBath proposes a countercultural notion that the exercise of Christian leadership is rooted in a personal relationship with God. Adopting this attitude provides McBath the capacity to resist defining successful leadership within the framework of corporate models of leadership, which are constructed upon accumulating power through influence. He provides an alternative framework of successful leadership based upon the pursuit of an intimate and vibrant relationship with God. Bishop McBath presses his point by asserting: "Money, fame, influence-- nothing comes close to being God's friend-- and that is *Living at the Next Level*" (15).

McBath harnesses the power of narrative theology by engaging the reader in stories from his own life and the biblical text. Interweaving personal and biblical narratives within the book serves as a great model for the integration of both orthodoxy and orthopraxis when producing content under the genre of Christian leadership. It further aids in providing an alternative to corporate leadership models built upon a framework of accumulation of power, status, and wealth. McBath proposes that the core of this alternative model should be assembled upon four attitudes that will position leaders to live at the next level.

The first attitude proposed by McBath is to have a heart for friendship with God. McBath makes explicit what is often implicit in Christian leadership books by declaring it "begins and

ends in friendship with God” (35). Making this pronouncement reinforces the idea that Christian leadership requires a theological underpinning that is not supplied by corporate models of leadership. Upon quoting John 14:6, McBath writes, “Our friendship with God through Jesus is the way to the path--the beginning of Next Level living” (35). Replacing friendship with God over power through influence as the primary component of Christian leadership leads to addressing human limitations and their connection to leadership.

When the framework for leadership is rooted in a friendship with God, it allows leaders to develop gratitude in the difficulties of life. Directing the reader to the biblical narrative of Peter’s imprisonment in Act chapter twelve, McBath proffers that leaders who develop gratitude understand that limitations are an opportunity to deepen faith. No longer an impediment to leadership, limitations can be seen as an opportunity for deepening one’s relationship with God. Juxtaposing the inevitability of limitations against the cultivation of gratitude provides leaders with a fresh approach to perceiving the role of limitations in the formation of a Christian leader.

Yet, a life of gratitude does not require Christian leaders to be defined by their limitations. Rather, McBath advises that a life of gratitude will propel the Christian leader to have a heart of expectancy towards God. McBath contends that expectancy towards God positions leaders to see beyond their limitations: “Our problem is that we give up on God too easily. To protect ourselves from frustration in difficult times, we often lower our expectations of God” (129). To punctuate the point, McBath shares the story of a mission trip to Estonia, placed adjacent to the story of Peter’s release from prison in Acts 12 as means of challenging the reader to respond to God’s call--even when circumstances appear bleak.

The final attitude of a Christian leader striving to live at the next level is to have the heart to seek God. McBath proposes this as the climax of Christian leadership, or living at the next level. God’s love for humanity is deep enough to have care for both the internal and external affairs of His people. This allows for spiritual formation to be elevated alongside the traditional metrics of success as advanced by corporate leadership models. It further provides a level of grace

that stands in direct opposition to the capitalistic drivers embedded in secular leadership theories. Thus, in many ways McBath brings the reader full circle, by beginning and ending his work by locating Christian leadership in a vibrant relationship with God.

Locating the final destination of “next level leadership” within a relational walk with God provides a stability that is absent when more money, influence, or power serve as the final destination. The latter are temporal elements that are in a constant state of flux. When friendship with God is the final destination of “the next level,” the leader has an eternal focus, not a temporal one based on circumstances or people. This attitude further allows Christian leaders to develop mutually reinforcing attitudes of gratitude and expectancy towards God. *Living at the Next Level: Leadership Edition* provides an alternative framework towards understanding Christian leadership, that prioritizes matters of the heart as vitally important to the expression of leadership, and therefore can serve as the basis for exploring new pathways of leadership within the specific genre of Christian leadership.

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