

## Book Review

*The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations and Communities*

**R. Scott Rodin**

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A startling confession comes from a man of great accomplishment and success; although his resumé is replete with extensive theological education, experience as a company president, authorship of five books, service as a seminary president, and leadership skills expressed through numerous non-corporate roles, Rodin gathers up more than thirty years of leadership and service and declares, “I have been mostly wrong.”

This statement is not a thoughtless ploy to dismiss the many good things that have come from his work. Rodin steps back and reflectively descends below surface considerations (the “whats and hows” of leadership) into his “understanding of Christian ministry.” Rummaging around the basement of his soul, he makes a discovery that leads to his disquieting confession, “I was wrong in my expectations of others and myself. And what may be the hardest to admit, I was wrong in my motives” (11).

Rodin’s epiphany sprang from a shift in biblical perspective. Justification for seizing opportunities in ministry and business fit neatly into Nathan’s directive to King David, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you” (2 Sam. 7:3). These days, Christ’s incarnation takes prominence. The Apostle

Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:27 (KJV) is the new lens by which Rodin sees leadership; Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.”

Far from having a bad image or questionable reputation, Jesus had no reputation. Rodin suggests that “prestige, prominence, power and other trappings of leadership were not only devalued, they were purposefully dismissed ... by intention and design. It was only in this form that he [Jesus] could serve, love, give, teach and, yes, lead” (12). The central idea upon which the book is constructed is that the heart of godly leadership is anchored in the discipline of no reputation. No reputation has its perfect work when leaders move from being owners of authority and domains to stewards under assignment by God. Of course, in the Kingdom economy, Kingdom stewards should reflect their King.

This book is not a treatise on stewardship or leadership how-tos. Rodin’s journey in leadership is about becoming, not doing; about being, not performing; about transformation, not transaction. Therefore, in the book’s first section, the reader explores the character God and His intentions. This discussion lays a foundation for answering questions of individual

identity and purpose, both of which have profound implications for leadership attitude and behavior.

Part two unveils the fundamental convictions on which the steward leader matrix is built. At the core of Rodin's argument is a call for order and priority. First and foremost, all leaders are called to be godly stewards. This is God's world, not the world of humanity. Principles 1 and 2 outline the case for stewards who are created in God's image and embrace a new world view about roles. Principle 3 distinguishes the steward leader from the "prevailing faith-based and secular views of relationship" (93). Rodin suggests a holistic framework that includes factoring in both man's depravity and need for transformational grace and an inward-outward work of the Spirit. Only then will a leader step into the role of leader and do so in the strength of character necessary for enduring results.

In part three, Rodin unpacks implications. A response to God will touch the steward leader in relationship to God, self, neighbor, and creation. As he writes about these four levels of relationship and the transformational effect, care is taken to avoid "language of techniques or steps in a process" (92). Why? The steward leader's outlook and response springs from revelation about God, His call, and purposes. The Holy Spirit, not technique or method, empowers transformation. Transformation has an expanding effect, beginning in the life of the steward leader, moving to the life of the people he or she leads, and then playing out in the life of the organization he or she leads.

Someone searching for a simple, prescriptive approach to steward leadership implications may leave feeling somewhat wanting. However, if the reader sits with Rodin and observes how he lays down the principles and theology in earlier chapters, the next step to application will be in reach for most individuals. Think of the author as a guide who directs the reader by taking his or her shoulders from behind and pivoting the reader toward an appropriate course. Furthermore, the author encourages the readers to stay traveling north and watch for these signs along the way; if you do, you'll always be heading the right direction.

Rodin hints at this attitude by his choice of the word 'trajectories' rather than 'implications.' A trajectory "only points to the direction such work might take, and leaves the reader to fill the blanks with the endless possibilities that are a part of his or her vocational calling" (9). When faced with the seedy morass of tainted motivations and self-justifying reasoning, Rodin points the reader in the direction of pure water for the leader's soul. But, one must walk, draw, drink, and bathe; no one else can do this for a person.

*The Steward Leader* is suited as a primer for group discussions or individual reflection, as the author scatters at least fifteen blocks of reflection and application questions throughout the book. They will aid in assimilation of content and create a bridge to real world ramifications. Rodin will stretch one's worldview by considering the ramifications of picking up leadership in God's world and by challenging one's notion of where success originates.