ForeWord Reviews

The Outward Focused Life: Becoming a Servant in a Serve-Me World
Dave Workman
Baker Books
978-0-8010-7150-8
(August 2008)

In a world filled with YouTube, MySpace, *Grand Theft Auto*, and reality television shows, the idea that individuals might serve anyone but themselves is an anomaly. Yet, as Dave Workman, the senior pastor of Vineyard Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, predicts in this sometimes humorous and sometimes simplistic book, churches in America will become known for their desire to serve others rather than for their self-centered focus on theology or denominational politics.

The nine sections of Workman's book are collections of his short radio talks, categorized into topics ranging from "on being a servant" and "availability," to "grace" and "small things." Any collection like this one contains repetition, and Workman's collection is no different. In addition, because it is a collection of loosely connected vignettes, the book often lacks direction and substance. However, Workman's passion for servanthood and for teaching people how to serve enlivens this book and invites his readers to abandon the desire to be served and begin to serve others. For example, Workman tells the story of Doug, who moved to Dayton, Ohio, to plant a church. Through a series of events in which God led Doug to help one woman repair a car, he begins to serve others by repairing cars, even though he's not trained as a mechanic. Using Doug's story, Workman happily points out that to be a servant "You don't need to be brave. You don't need to be smart. You don't need to have it all together. You just need to have a desire to serve some lost soul with a little bit of love and a whole lot of grace, which God seems to supply in abundance."

Workman is honest though, and points out how difficult it is to be a servant. "Sometimes people mistake the outward-focused life and serving others with being nice. Nothing could be further from the truth." Serving others requires the servant to pray and work to lead people to turn around from their self-centered lives. Loving the selfish requires patience, grace, and courage and, according to Workman, sometimes requires spiritual warfare, invoking the power of God to defeat the power of Satan.

In spite of their bravado and their emphasis on turning from self-centeredness to other-centeredness, Workman's talks will appeal primarily to other Christians who understand the language in which he makes his central points.

Henry L. Carrigan