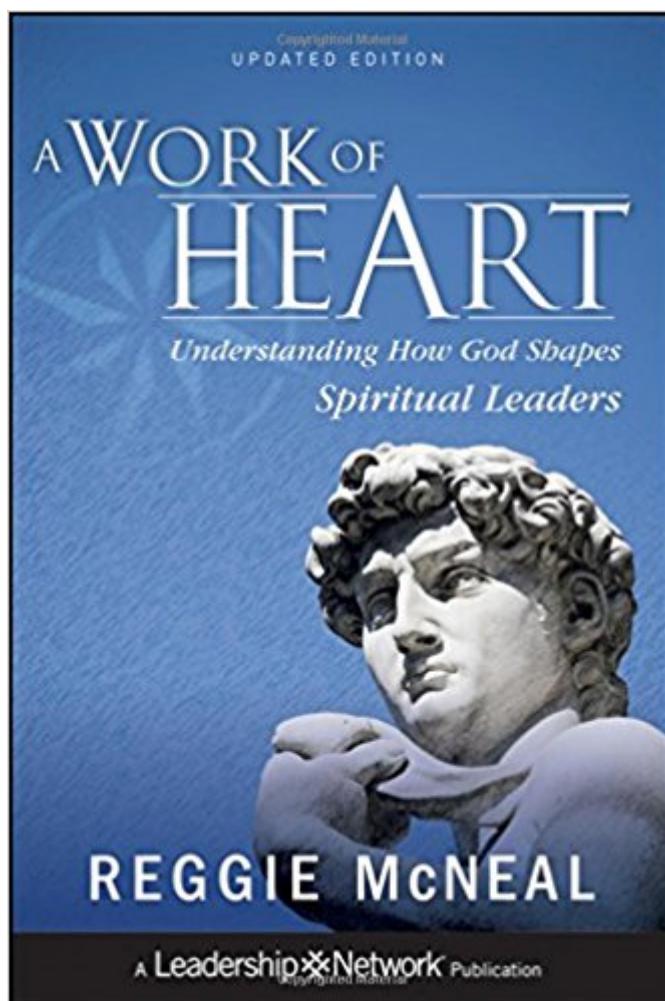


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# A Work Of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders



## Synopsis

Revised and updated edition of the classic work on spiritual leadership *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. Offers guidance for church leaders to let God shape their hearts from the inside out Reggie McNeal is the author of the bestselling book *Missional Renaissance* Gives reassurance for maintaining perspective while doing the demanding work of ministry The book includes illustrative stories of contemporary leaders opening their hearts to God's guidance.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Jossey-Bass; 2 edition (September 27, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1118103181

ISBN-13: 978-1118103180

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 0.8 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 62 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #53,063 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church Leadership #826 in Books > Business & Money > Management & Leadership > Leadership #9693 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

## Customer Reviews

Leadership is less about technique or motivation than it is about the leader's own heart, suggests Southern Baptist denominational leader McNeal in this careful and readable book. Through brief studies of the lives of Moses, David, Paul and Jesus, McNeal elucidates six factors in the shaping of a leader's heart, all of which begin with the letter c. Although somewhat formulaic, this approach yields fresh fruit, thanks to McNeal's well-integrated grasp of both his biblical sources and contemporary psychology and organizational theory. Among his cs are at least three that are rarely explored in more conventional Christian writing on leadership: the role of "culture" in preparing a leader for his or her specific ministry, the necessity of having a "community" that supports and

complements the leader and the importance of "commonplace" experiences that happen out of the leadership limelight. McNeal's attempts to contextualize the biblical narratives lead to some moments of ungainly jargon ("Jesus was constantly online with the Father") and questionable interpretation ("Jesus recruited his initial band of disciples from the business community"), but these are comparatively rare. Christian leaders will find this a valuable primer that invites further reflection; like many primers, however, it would have benefited from a bibliography to guide readers beyond its relatively protected waters. (Apr.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"It is not just the skills of ministry that are important. The heart-sculpting work of God creates quality ministries. *A Work of Heart* explains how God is shaping each of us for future service." --Bob Buford, founding chairman, Leadership Network "We've read leadership manuals ad nauseum. We've attended every high-powered conference imaginable. We've bought the T-shirts, the three-ring binders, and all the right soundbites. But if we're honest, we're in serious drift mode, and we know it. . . . In *A Work of Heart*, Reggie McNeal has given us nothing less than CPR for the leader's soul, a book that moves us beyond leadership "how-tos" to the lifeline of genuine influence--our own intricate, passionate journey with God." --Sally Morgenthaler, author, *Worship Evangelism* "Everyone committed to developing leaders must study Reggie McNeal's understandings of heart shaping, and in doing so, will experience their own hearts being sculpted." --Donald O. Clifton, chairman, The Gallup Organization "This is a must-read for present and emerging leaders who desire to balance practical leadership techniques with a heart shaped by God. In typical McNeal fashion, this book makes the connection between the truths of Scripture and the real world the leader lives in." --Tim Schroeder, senior pastor, Trinity Baptist Church, Kelowna, BC, Canada "Don't lose heart! Reggie McNeal helps us look under the hood, at the engine of our lives and leadership--our heart--and shows us what it takes to lead with increasing clarity and confidence and live with greater peace." --Dieter Zander, church planter, San Francisco, CA --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The heart of McNeal's *\*A Work of Heart\** is to challenge leaders in the church to a level of introspection with which the author assumes many are not familiar. Many of the skills spiritual leaders cultivate have tangible, and often quantifiable, results. McNeal challenges his readers to strive for spiritual goods--goods that are often intangible and whose direct outcomes are difficult to measure. It's hard to find fault with that kind of premise. As I read through the book and tried

to process what I liked and disliked about it, I came to the conclusion that it is the anecdotal nature of the book that captures its best and worst qualities. On the positive side, McNeal is obviously a seasoned and wise minister to ministers. Based on the amount of stories McNeal tells one gets the feeling that a lot of this book is the kind of wisdom he gives on a daily basis to the spiritual leaders he assists through his ministry. The reader will benefit from McNeal's experience and wisdom as he reflects upon the six central domains of introspection or "heart works" he selects. In this sense, reading this book is like having a long lunch with a seasoned mentor and soaking in the advice and stories he has to offer. That kind of thing has its own intrinsic value, and we can call it anecdotal value. In courts of law "anecdotal evidence" is the kind of evidence that comes from a single person whose perspective is considered valuable but limited. The evidence is not considered complete until it is compared to other accounts and data. So on the positive side of things, McNeal's anecdotal book is valuable precisely because it gives us the wisdom and perspective of a credible witness in spiritual leadership without all the distillation that a more critical account might require. This book is a great start to a conversation, and it is up to the reader to decide where to agree and disagree with McNeal to continue it. Yet the anecdotal nature of the book also limits its value. The book lacks a bibliography precisely because McNeal chooses not to investigate the topics beyond the scope of his own knowledge-base. Of course the author has obviously read, studied, and thought about these topics. And it is not difficult to see at certain points where McNeal is reacting to certain trends in ministry or ideologies in the air. But where he alludes to outside voices he is mostly negative and dismissive. There is no real dialogue, complexity, or nuance that a more critical investigation might offer. The reader simply gets McNeal's pontifications. This is frustrating in two ways. First, unless a spiritual leader has not thought about these ideas at all (which I don't think is true of the majority of this book's target audience), the book does not offer much in the way of novelty. This means that the reader must slog through a lot of familiar ideas to get to the nuggets of wisdom. One might even have problems with the perspective McNeal offers on these familiar ideas simply because they have a history of debate that the author largely ignores. Second, it leads to a number of errors that distract from the main purposes of the book. McNeal's explicit refusal to use outside sources like commentaries on his outline of Moses, David, Paul, and Jesus in the first part leads to a number of exegetical errors in the way McNeal understands these figures. In addition, the anecdotal, conversational nature of McNeal's reflections produce contradictions inevitable to any one-sided perspective. For instance, although at a number of points McNeal rejects the primacy of attendance numbers as the most important evaluative tool for ministerial success, the

vast majority of his narrative examples define success in terms of numerical growth or loss. To summarize, the anecdotal nature of the book is both its strength and weakness. On the one hand, it gives us an audience at McNeal's feet, learning from someone with experience who has thought through these issues in his own way and puts them to practice in his own ministerial context. On the other hand, it limits the extent to which McNeal can offer anything more than a one-sided perspective, and often falls prey to bothersome errors. As a point of confession, I write this as a seminary-trained minister. My story is one that began in introspection and theological education and now I'm beginning to tackle a host of complementary skills necessary to a holistic ministry (like leadership training, which is why I'm reading this book). My suspicion is that McNeal is writing for those whose stories are the opposite: those who have the amazing leadership, technological, and other kinds of skills that I'm working towards and find themselves working towards introspective, spiritual, and theological skills. In that sense, the book is well-merited, if not timely, as the seminary model of ministry training continues to decline. Yet for those that are familiar with the basics of spiritual discipline, introspection, culture, vocation, community, etc., there might be other books of more value. Any reader will benefit from this book some way, but there may be more efficient ways to spend the limited amount of time ministers have for personal study.

We are tempted on all sides, but our strength lies with Jesus, and this give way to intentionality in our ministry. McNeal states, "lack of focus eventually bankrupts early dreams" (p. 59). If my ministry was a train then it is the frequent stops that sometimes breaks concentration on my intentionality. Fun read to reflect on our intentionality of being sure the ministry one does is "A Work of Heart"

I was given this book some years ago by a pastor and Christian leader that I greatly respected. I devoured the book and have returned to it again and again. I now make a habit of re-reading at least once each year and I find it new and insightful each time. I bought this copy to give to someone else to encourage them in their walk with God, and work for God, to further energize them. I highly, highly recommend this book for anyone who wishes to get serious about working to advance the Kingdom of God. The first part of the book brings novel insights into the development of the ministries of Moses, David, Paul and Jesus. He then brings very realistic ways of viewing one's role in working for God and powerfully brings in their experiences in practical ways.

HIGHLY recommend this book as a resource for anyone in a leadership role. While the aim is

geared toward pastoral leaders, the principles remain the same for anyone who desires to be a godly leader. Thought provoking insight and questions for reflection. Great read!

After some dissatisfaction in the first chapter or two, McNeal gets to the meat, and covers some very important and very interesting points for anyone in ministry.

This book offers deep and insightful observations into the process of forming leaders. It honestly assesses the battles, risks, and fruit of God's masterful work and plan for the heart of leaders.

Reggie McNeal is an amazing author who is able to bring spiritual truths to everyone in an interesting way.

Amazing book!

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