

The Spiritual Art of Business: Connecting the Daily with the Divine

By Barry L. Rowan, InterVarsity Press, 2023, 176 pages, \$19.99

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How can one pursue a meaningful career in business and maintain Christian values that promote spiritual growth? Barry L. Rowan addresses this complex question by reflecting on his life in business and seeking to live like Christ. His book, *The Spiritual Art of Business: Connecting the Daily With the Divine*, provides readers with a practical devotional that challenges them to apply biblical principles to areas of their lives and occupations. Rowan's background includes diverse business development experience that includes building and transforming eight enterprises. He serves as a board member at several for-profit and nonprofit corporations. The author pulls from his life experience of building businesses and serving corporations to provide readers with an impactful read. Rowan claims that his book has value to a broad audience, including "people in any kind of work or any form of leadership... mid-level managers, and manual laborers; entrepreneurs, small-business owners, and creative gig workers; teachers, stay-at-home parents, ministry leaders; and more" (p. 4). While Rowan seems extremely optimistic about reaching this wide demographic, his work maintains a special value to Christians involved in the corporate world.

Rowan divides his book into four main sections. These four main sections correlate with the author's intended use of the book, which proposes a four-fold practice that communicates the spiritual art of business to his readers. He presents these sections as: surrender, transformation, new creation, and into the world (p. 5). These four practices showcase the spiritual art of business as a cycle that individuals seek to accomplish in their occupation. Upon establishing this cycle of the spiritual art in business, Rowan states, "God uses our work to do his work in us. And as we are transformed by him, he will transform the world through us" (p. 7). This main idea drives the discussion of this book, as the author highlights his successes and shortcomings that show how his idea of work became transformed by submitting to

the will of God. The brief chapters make the book easy to read in small sections at a time. The book maintains a cohesive flow that also engages readers who read the book in its entirety in one sitting. Every chapter has a section of reflection questions that coincide with the chapter's primary topic. Additionally, Rowan adopts second-person and first-person plural voices throughout his book to engage with readers on a deep personal level. The layout and personal narrative voice allows for readers to easily engage with the book.

Rowan's cycle begins with surrendering to God. He remarks how "surrender is a lifelong process that continues its work until it has worked its way into every moment, every decision, and every action we undertake" (p. 13). This surrender is the cornerstone for Rowan's book as he continuously refers to starting with submission to the Lord. In each chapter, Rowan starts with one or two Scripture verses that correlate with his key points within these chapters. The first section of his book highlights how one can only overcome failure by first surrendering to God. He argues that surrendering to God "makes us better bosses... [and] better coworkers..." (p. 31). The author builds from this mindset of humility, which comes from surrendering to God, for the remaining sections of his book.

In the second section, Rowan discusses the topic of transformation. The author discusses how God transformed him through his submission to God's will. He recounts one moment where he avoided awkward or difficult conversations with people and either held a grudge or became too passive. Rowan states, "I learned to be more direct.... And I learned forgiveness" (p. 52). Subsequently, the author invites readers to reflect on how God can transform their lives. The author encourages his readers to be driven by love instead of succumbing to fear. They are encouraged to make every decision out of love that will allow for God to move and transform individuals

to live a life for Christ. By moving through any form of friendship, romantic relationship, or professional relationship, Rowan pushes for this Christ-like behavior to transform a business's culture into a positive Christian atmosphere that promotes personal growth. Rowan highlights the importance of having genuine relationships with people. He remarks how the "destination of our journey is into ever-deeper relationships with God and our fellow travelers" (p. 76). Genuine relationships based on mutual love and affection can foster a better work environment and perceived support in personal life.

The third and fourth sections of Rowan's work serves as a direct encouragement for the reader. These sections push the reader to see how their work matters in the grand scheme of God's plan. Embracing God's plan to redeem the world starts with obtaining a life-giving perspective on work that, as the author described, is "others-centered" (p. 112). Rowan reminds his readers about maintaining a proper perspective on money and responsibilities, as professionals have a "high calling" faithfully serving as steward of God's assets (p. 118). The author shows throughout his book examples of how acting as a steward in the business world grants "the opportunity for the promotion of people and their talents" (p. 148). Rowan draws on his personal experience to showcase how he promotes individuals to roles with greater leadership responsibility. This strategy allows his employees to grow within their positions. The author's intentions are for these employees to outgrow these roles, enabling them to pursue further promotions and avoid a stagnant environment filled with dead-end jobs. He encourages his audience in his conclusion to surrender to God and allow for the transformation of themselves, so that God can "transform the world through us" (p. 164). Additionally, Rowan provides practical advice throughout his book on the importance of reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, consistently attending church, focusing on physical health, and making sure business does not interfere with family responsibilities.

The intended providence of the book does not appear limited to North America or western culture. Thus, the book remains applicable to any culture but maintains a special value for corporate America. While the author's overreliance on personal experience may limit its utility for scholars, this should not disqualify the book for its potential use in Christian universities seeking to integrate biblical truths into their business curriculum. The book would have a particular impact on grounding college students and business professionals in appreciating

how integrating biblical truths could aid their business ventures and allow them to foster an environment that furthers God's kingdom on earth. The book effectively presents readers with a devotional read that can contribute to their spiritual growth towards a deeper appreciation for their work and a deeper relationship with God.

The *Spiritual Art of Business* is a very encouraging work that has considerable value to a general audience. While this book is not recommended for business or biblical scholarship, it provides practical implications and remains a useful devotional to deepen readers' personal lives. The book does very little to push any form of scholarship and lacks critical engagement with business or biblical scholarship. Despite this general limitation, I highly recommend this book to business professionals. The book effectively presents a devotional read that succeeds in giving readers a practical guide to navigating business with effective reflection questions that ultimately deepen the reader's faith and relationship with God through their marketplace pursuits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Trevor Hodges is a doctoral student at Regent University pursuing a PhD in renewal theology with a concentration in biblical studies. Trevor completed a BA in biblical and theological studies and an MDiv with a concentration in the New

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