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Seven Women and the Secret of Their Greatness

Author: Eric Metaxas.

Review by
Rosemary Thrasher
North Greenville University

*Seven Women and the Secret of Their Greatness* by Eric Metaxas, published by Thomas Nelson Books in 2015, is the much anticipated answer to *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness* by the same author. The seven women are Joan of Arc, Susanna Wesley, Hanna More, Maria of Paris, Corrie ten Boom, Rosa Parks and Mother Teresa.

The title is somewhat misleading, because the path to greatness is not a secret. Matthew 5:19 says, “Whosoever shall do and teach [these commandments] shall be great in the kingdom of heaven,” and Matthew 18:4 continues, “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Greatness, then, requires both obedience to God and humility. The way Metaxas describes greatness in the introduction is quite similar, “using what God gives you for the benefit of mankind,”(viii).

Metaxas does not preach about greatness, but he lets these women demonstrate greatness through their lives and actions. Two women in particular humbled themselves in the service of others. Corrie ten Boom showed love to her Jewish neighbors by gathering extra ration cards at great risk to her family, hiding Jews in her home, witnessing to prison guards, and holding worship services in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. Mother Theresa often said she was inspired by Christ’s teaching that
“in as much as you have done it to the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me.” Both these women humbly served those around them.

Joan of Arc, Hanna More, and Rosa Parks had something in common in that they each believed in a cause and were willing to work toward it despite hardships. We may not all believe in the voices Joan says she heard, but she believed in them, and she acted accordingly, enabling her to lift the siege of Orleans and get the Dauphin crowned Charles VII. Hanna More used her writing skills to promote abolition of slavery, education of the poor, and a new, egalitarian attitude toward women. While the politicians of her day worked at changing laws, Hanna worked at the equally important job of enlightening people’s minds. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus and her action became the flashpoint of the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. The Supreme Court subsequently ruled that segregated buses were unconstitutional. All of these women helped change history.

Susanna Wesley served her large family despite great hardship. She did what she could with what she had, which was a great education. She reared all of her children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord,” and produced one of the great preachers of the Great Awakening, John Wesley, and the great hymn writer, Charles Wesley, both of whose influence is with us today.

Eric Metaxas’ characters come alive in Seven Women. Each chapter is a short biography that transports you to another time and place. You don’t want to put the book down until you find out what happened to each heroine. The author’s style is engaging and conversational enough to attract casual readers, and the historical backgrounds and the lives of each woman are meticulously researched to please the serious readers.

One of my favorite parts of the book was when Mother Teresa accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, surprising the audience by taking the opportunity to make a strong anti-abortion speech, causing the officials on the platform to squirm. I was also intrigued to learn that Hanna More became a more “vital Christian” after reading Cardiphonia, by John Newton, the former slave-trader-turned-hymn writer. Now I am curious to read Newton’s book, too. I was amazed that Susanna Wesley, who as a young women had “a theological knowledge superior to many ministers of that day,” (32) did not fully understand salvation until, at the age of seventy one, after hearing her son John preach, the Lord used the words of the Lord’s Supper to convince her that “God for Christ’s sake had forgiven all my sins,” (56).

Seven Women is nothing if not an uplifting and encouraging book. No person who reads this book will ever again think, “What I do does not matter.” Whatever your walk of life, your humble obedience to God’s calling will have consequences that continue on for generations, and that are not revealed until heaven. Readers of Seven Women will be blessed and encouraged by the accounts of so many women committed to serving God and serving their fellow man.

In the Footsteps of King David: Revelations from an Ancient Biblical City

Authors: Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor and Michael Hasel, Publisher: Thames & Hudson, 2018

Reviewed by Brenton H. Cook
Bob Jones University

In the Footsteps of King David: Revelations from an Ancient Biblical City is a history of the seven-year archaeological investigation of
Khirbet Qeiyafa, a city dating to the reign of King David. The city was largely unknown even to the archaeological community before a 2008 New York Times article devoted a full page to describing the site's initial findings. Since then, Khirbet Qeiyafa has generated extraordinary interest disclosing for the first time a layer of civilization contemporary with David. Archaeologists and authors Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor and Michael Hasel devoted seven excavation seasons to the site, concluding their work in 2013. They have managed to produce a highly readable volume introducing not only the city, but the discipline of archaeology to the non-professional.

Khirbet Qeiyafa is located near the area where the biblical tradition locates the shepherd boy’s battle with the Philistine giant. While the authors acknowledge the limitations of archaeological research in definitively establishing the existence of David, they interpret the finds at Khirbet Qeiyafa as a refutation of the popular minimalist approach and defend the biblical tradition as reliable.

At the end of the twentieth century King David and his illustrious son Solomon came to be viewed by minimalists as imaginative literary creations. Arguing that the historical texts of the Old Testament were written during the Hellenistic or Persian periods, minimalists viewed the biblical texts as minimally reliable if not entirely apocryphal. Minimalists not only eliminated the possibility of a United Kingdom, but also questioned the existence of a Judahite kingdom before the mid-eight century BCE. While Garfinkel, Ganor and Hasel fall far short of endorsing the complete historicity of the Old Testament (including the United Kingdom of Judah and Israel), their work represents a significant blow to minimalism and defends the view that Judah was an established Kingdom by 1000 BCE.

Khirbet Qeiyafa is situated at the western edge of the upper Shephelah near the entrance to the Valley of Elah, where the biblical record tells us the Philistine’s
resembles that of four other cities in the kingdom of Judah. Analysis of tens of thousands of animal bones disclosed no pig bones. The site turned up no cult paraphernalia typically found in Canaanite cities. The extensive use of iron tools fits the pattern of additional Iron Age cities in Israel. The city is strategically located on the border between the Judean Shephelah and Philistia. And finally, the site yielded an inscription on a sherd that was written in a Semitic language.

In the Footsteps of King David is not merely a detailed archaeological report written for experts in the field. Rather the text reads like an adventure novel, field guide, archaeology introduction, and ancient history all rolled into a single volume. Supplementing the text are city schematics, photographs, maps and diagrams taking the reader on location. The authors include numerous anecdotes describing the complexities and pitfalls of archaeological work and give their readers a realistic assessment of the limitations of the archaeological discipline for reconstructing the past.

Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels (First Edition)

Author: J. Warner Wallace
Publisher: David Cook, 2013

Reviewed by
Lindsay E. Gayle
Liberty University

Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels was written by J. Warner Wallace, a cold-case homicide detective of twenty-five years. In this book, Wallace gives a detailed account of the evidence presented in the Gospels, and how to investigate that evidence to determine its reliability and validity. The author was an atheist for many years, who later converted to Christianity after investigating the evidence of Jesus as outlined in the Gospels in the Bible. Wallace uses his investigative skills to guide readers through the evidence presented in the Gospels to show how closely the case for Christianity can be related to his cold cases.

Throughout the book the author uses clear, concise language that the reader can understand and provides supporting examples or scenarios to help the reader grasp the concepts being presented. When investigating a cold case or the case of Jesus, Wallace informs readers to have an open mind and be willing to assess the evidence without any preconceived notions. He states, “The questions is not whether or not we have ideas, opinions, or preexisting points of view; the question is whether or not we will allow these perspectives to prevent us from examining the evidence objectively” (30). Being able to fully investigate the claims of the Gospel begins by putting opinions to the side to truly understand the evidence at hand. Wallace focused on investigating the eyewitness testimony (chapter 4) and discussed the importance of reviewing the eyewitness testimony in cold-cases to determine the validity of it. However, for the case of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Wallace cannot review the original eyewitness’s testimony because they are deceased. In cold
cases, detectives may be able to return to the same witness to hear their story again. For Wallace, he has to use the evidence in the Bible about eyewitness testimony.

Another of the principles discussed is to hang on to every word (chapter 5). In doing this, the reader, when investigating the claims of the gospels, should pay close attention to the words and phrases used in the gospel. To pick apart the wording of the gospels to develop a full understanding and analysis of what the Bible is saying about the account of Jesus. Wallace tells how in the gospel of Mark, Peter is frequently mentioned and was the source of information in Mark’s gospel. This led to the proof that Mark was an eyewitness account to the case of Jesus. Wallace also discusses conspiracy theories as they relate to the eyewitness accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus through the Apostles. Wallace notes that the Apostles could not have conspired together due to their extended time apart from one another after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Also, “none of the twelve recanted their claims related to the resurrection” decades after the incident and were persecuted for their claims (116). This evidence proved the Apostles were eyewitnesses who told the truth.

Examining the evidence of the gospels was done by asking four questions: were they present, were they corroborated, were they accurate, and were they biased? Wallace provides detailed information to answer these questions and discusses how the eyewitness accounts pass each test to prove the case of Jesus. Wallace leaves the final decision up to the reader on how they want to go from “belief that” to “belief in.” At the end, the author leaves readers with a postscript, which provides them with details surrounding his personal encounter of turning to Christ after reviewing the evidence in the Gospels. Wallace tells how he became a “two decision” Christian, meaning he accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior, but that had to be done after carefully examining the evidence of Jesus. Knowing the truths of the evidence allowed Wallace to be fully accepting that Jesus was the truth. This book is an excellent read for those who are wanting to dig deeper into the evidence of the Christian faith. Also, it serves as a great tool to help defend your faith to those who may have trouble believing.

What God Has Joined Together

Author: Travis Agnew
Publisher: Tag Publishing, 2018

Reviewed by Andrea D. Stiles
Shorter University

In this book, Travis Agnew, pastor, author, and devoted father, makes the case for the necessity of a biblical foundation for successful marriage. From the outset, the author relies on a biblical definition of marriage from Genesis and honors the symbolism of marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church that is detailed in Ephesians. Written in a direct and concise manner, What God Has Joined Together, addresses common challenges to marriage. In 31 brief chapters, the author names and describes what often creates a divide between spouses. Each title contains the words, “Let no ______________ Separate.” This design makes for easy access to useful information on specific topics. Additionally, each chapter utilizes relevant scripture passages for readers to reference, study, and apply. Topics include conflict, selfishness, indifference, expectations, communication, secrets, hardship, incompatibility, disrespect, addiction, adultery, pornography, money matters, pride, friendships, in-laws, children, career, midlife struggles, and more. The straightforward approach to addressing these issues makes them experientially relatable. Personal journal
pages for noting reflections and responses to suggested scripture reading identifies the author’s purpose to draw readers into engagement with scriptures’ teachings on marriage.

The author’s understanding of marital pitfalls is communicated as one who walks the marriage road with his own two feet. His reliance on scripture to shine illuminating light on the nature of those involved in marriage guides the reader and encourages honest reflection. The emphasis on every person’s need for correction, direction, and commitment orients the reader to a biblical perspective. Obviously written to a Christian audience, the author does not shy away from the fact that the challenges unbelievers face in marriage also emerge in Christian marriage. He acknowledges the human susceptibility to error that leaves no one untouched.

Intertwining scripture with story connects the present to the past, making clear that the root of marital conflict has not changed. The tendency for human beings to look outside of self to another as the cause of their own dissatisfaction is universal and only changes when this truth is faced with acceptance and humility.

Each topic covered reveals the fundamental role of sin nature that is to be battled daily for marriage to be a picture of sacrificial love. Love is defined as unselfish, grace-based, chosen, committed action as opposed to an emotional, feeling state. Responsibility for honoring the marital commitment is placed on the individual, fostering maturity and encouraging personal agency. The book’s journal section calls for considering personal experience in light of scripture giving opportunity for readers to notice their own attitudinal or behavioral mishandling of the marriage relationship. The format calls for accountability; to document where you are, where you need to be, and how you plan to get there. As one gains biblical understanding from chapter to chapter, roles and responsibilities are clarified, and God’s purpose for marriage is discovered.

The centrality of commitment to Christ for marital longevity and vibrancy is unmistakable in the pages of this short book as well as the possibility for marriage to reflect the wonder of the gospel to a watching world.

This book is a must-read for dedicated marriage partners who hope to build and maintain a lifelong, healthy marriage. Though written for a Christian audience, there is valuable wisdom to be gleaned for anyone who is willing to consider a radically different view of marriage than that of current western culture.

Rather than seeing marriage simply as means to happiness, status, and personal fulfillment, marriage is presented as an opportunity to learn and grow in sacrificial, not self-serving, ways. It offers insight into the heart of both the Christian faith as a whole, as well as to the integral role of marriage within the faith. All of one’s relationships may be enhanced by applying the concepts and practices of peacemaking, understanding, and self-regulation that the book promotes. Making clear the necessity of commitment to superordinate goals, those things that matter to both or all members of a relationship, rather than to what matters to a single individual, leads to better relationship satisfaction for those involved.

Because it is a relatively short book, only 128 pages, it can be read quickly for information on a broad range of interpersonal challenges. The topics are ones to revisit when relevant circumstances call for clarification on appropriate responses that will likely result in preservation of relationship. At this particular time in America when about half of all marriages end in divorce, this little book provides a hopeful alternative, one that honors the call to love long and to share life as one through all of its difficulties and joys until death, nothing else, requires parting.


Herrmann and Riedel have put together a rather helpful collection of essays about the need for higher education institutions to consider their role in caring for their students. Each contributor to the book works in a higher education or university context and thus are each poised to give particular insight into the nature of the relationship between institutions, including professors and staff, and students. Several chapters of the book stand-out as particularly helpful in developing a better understanding of what it means for an institution of higher education to care for their students, especially from a Christian worldview.

First, Miroslav Volf (Yale Divinity School) writes an essay entitled “What will save the world? Caring for a World We Cannot Save.” Here, he discusses the nature of the world broken by sin, a brokenness which needs fixing but cannot be fixed by human effort. Humans can, however, “mend” the situation, or to “improve the state of a single person” (27). He juxtaposes the Christian worldview of man’s brokenness with the failed attempts of modernism to fix the world through scientific analysis. He argues that the only true solution comes from a Christian conception of the world.

Another helpful article is “Teaching Students to Care for Themselves” by Kristen D. Riedel (Belmont University), Emilie K. Hoffman (Taylor University), and Jessica L. Martin (Taylor University). This chapter seeks to address the reality that students often have no real conception of what true self-care means, especially living in a context that gives them false examples of what good self-care looks like. They take the time to note that true self-care cannot come from technology or society but from a Christian understanding of existence as being ultimately about the pursuit of God, citing the work of James K. A. Smith. They also note that self-care is not simply beneficial, but a calling upon their lives from God, claiming that “when self-care is viewed as a vocational pursuit, it becomes one that is intentionally implemented in practice, with mindfulness of self and the practice, and one that is holistic” (96). They demonstrate that true spiritual maturity, which is what mentors are seeking to engender in their protégés.

A further article that bears mentioning is “A Call for Holistic Intellectual Care of University Students: An Essay for the Twenty-First Century Academy” by Anita Fitzgerald Henck (Azusa Pacific University). In this essay, she points to the modern tragedy of the “loss of intellectual cultivation of individuals, communities, and society at large” (112). She argues that, by focusing on self-examination in a spiritual sense, which contemporary higher education institutions have done, encouraging the growth of the spiritual self, colleges and universities have lost their primary focus, which is to foster “intellectual development and care” (113). This critique of contemporary institutions is well taken, in that self-actualization has become the measure for success in higher education, especially in a secular context. Henck is right that what is needed is a return to developing students intellectually, and Volf is right that this cannot be done through a purely modernistic framework but through the lens of a Christian worldview.

Herrmann finishes this book with a powerful essay entitled “Higher Education as an Exemplar of Care: Creating a Campus Culture of Care”. Here he makes the scathing accusation that, far too often, institutions and
personnel of higher education have been “guilty of treating students as revenue streams” rather than as human beings who have been placed under their care (197). He also notes that, since Christian higher education has not been as lucrative monetarily as they have been in previous years, this financial turbulence has led some institutions “to act as if their mission is simply to survive” rather than their own stated mission of caring for their students (198). His solution is to develop a mentoring structure and to actively attempt to avoid a consumerist mindset about the nature of institutions. He notes “caring for students is much more complex and driven by much different ends than caring for customers” (210). The idea that institutions do not exist simply as training for professions feeds a robust understanding of the true value of liberal-arts based education; a value lost all too often in today’s colleges and universities but a value that, if better understood, will chart new paths for success.

Special Undergraduate Spotlight Essay:

How To Help A Third World Nation: An Examination into the Countries of Central America

By Sydney Holmes
Shorter University

Since its founding in 1776, America has been a beacon of hope and prosperity to those who desire a better future. Americans are very fortunate to live in a first world country, where they have limitless option and opportunities. The United States has millions of immigrants flooding into the country, hoping to call it home. Most of these people come from third world countries. The term third world country originated from the Cold War to distinguish those who were neutral in the war but has evolved to mean a country that is poverty stricken. Some of these countries are better off than others. Specifically, in Central America, most of the countries are in economic and political turmoil. However, Costa Rica is in the middle of Central America, and it is far more prosperous than its neighbors in the region like Honduras and Nicaragua. Indeed, Costa Rica is doing better than its neighbors due to a stable government, limited dealings in narco-trafficking, and a great relationship with the United States.

To understand the situation in Costa Rica, we first need to understand the conditions of its neighbors. Nicaragua has always had a rocky government since its independence. When the Spanish left, there was no one to take their place. Many of the up