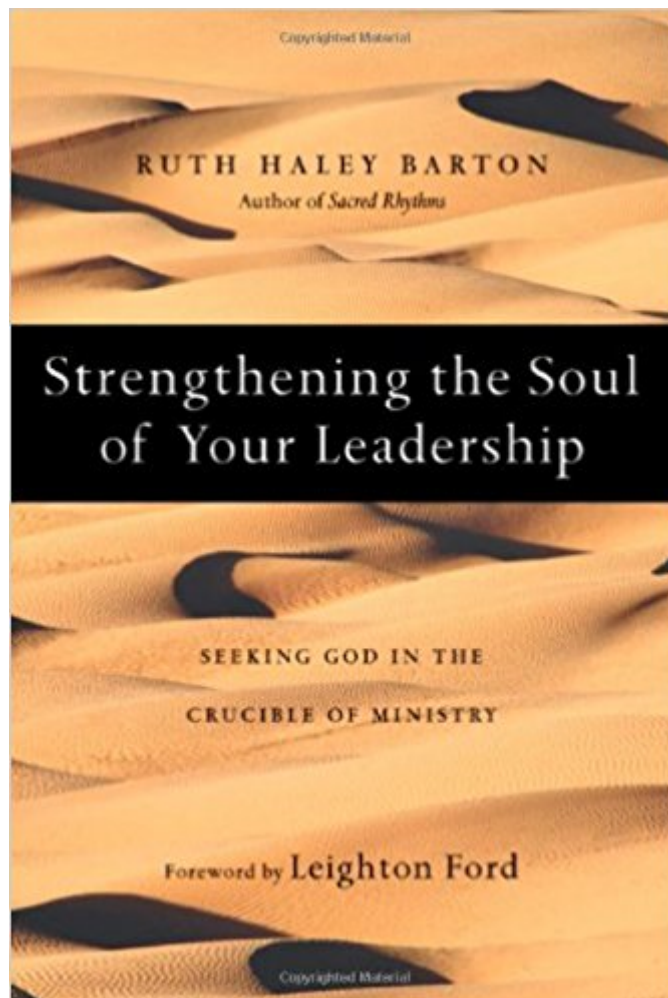




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Strengthening The Soul Of Your Leadership: Seeking God In The Crucible Of Ministry



Synopsis

"I'm tired of helping others enjoy God." "I just want to enjoy God for myself." With this painful admission, Ruth Haley Barton invites us to an honest exploration of what happens when spiritual leaders lose track of their souls. Weaving together contemporary illustrations with penetrating insight from the life of Moses, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* explores topics such as responding to the dynamics of calling, facing the loneliness of leadership, leading from your authentic self, cultivating spiritual community, reenvisioning the promised land, discerning God's will together. Each chapter includes a spiritual practice to ensure your soul gets the nourishment it needs. Forging and maintaining a life-giving connection with God is the best choice you can make for yourself and for those you lead.

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Customer Reviews

"Barton has written a book which could serve as a prescription for people in ministry who have come to the end of themselves. I recommend this book for leaders who have experienced a glance towards the dark night of the soul but have found themselves working harder, trusting less and growing weary in order to avoid the transforming work of the soul." (Susan Reese, *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*, 2009)"Ruth Haley Barton's book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* is a must-read for all those in ministry." (Larry Magnuson, *YouthWorker Journal*, January/February 2010)"There are many books that help sharpen our leadership skills, but this one brings challenging insights to strengthen our souls which will transform our leadership." (Kerry

Clarensau, Enrichment Journal, Fall 2009)"The book is not just for those already in leadership roles, but also for those who are seeking leadership." (Marlyne Seymour, The Living Church, January 4, 2009)"Ms. Barton relies heavily on the life of Moses as a window into the different aspects of leadership in which we might learn to seek God and allow God to strengthen us to provide spiritual leadership to others. The book is not just for those already in leadership roles, but also for those who are seeking leadership." (The Rev. Marlyne Seymour, The Living Church, January 4, 2009)"The most significant book I read in 2008 . . . is a call to inspect one's inner life and motives for leadership with neither guilt nor obsession, allowing God to tweak and morph it at will." (Danette Matty, YouthWorker Journal, January/February 2009)"It may seem hard to believe, being a pastor or other religious leader can be very draining on one's faith. Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership answers a real problem that many may not realize exists for their pastors and priests." (James A. Cox, Midwest Book Review, December 2008)"At times Barton's words were a needed wake-up call and at other times they were a source of refreshment. I'm thankful for both." (Mike Bonem, Leadership Network (books.leadnet.org), August 30, 2008)"This beautiful cross between Ordering Your Private World and Celebration of Discipline isn't a book you merely read; rather, [it's] one you process with the Holy Spirit, with passages that call to be re-read and swallowed slowly. Definitely not 'a glorified self-help project.'" (Danette Matty, YouthWorker Journal, September/October 2008)"For those of us who lead, there are many fine books to hone our skills. But too few excavate our souls. Too few tell us stark truths, and serve up strong tonic, and give us hope and courage in the face of our calling's hardships and loneliness and moments of sheer tedium. Too few teach us how to seek and find God in the maze of committee work and the darkness of criticism and the heartbreak of betrayal. This book does all that, and well. Ruth Haley Barton has kept company with Moses, a 'pragmatic' and 'visionary' leader who found that, unless God went with him, there was no place worth going. Ruth's insights will at the very least strengthen the soul of your leadership. For some, it may make the difference in whether you finish the race at all." (Mark Buchanan, author of The Rest of God and pastor of New Life Community Church, Duncan, British Columbia)"In the same spirit in which Henri Nouwen wrote The Return of the Prodigal Son, Ruth Haley Barton has captured the soul of Moses and has revealed him to us as a seeker of truth, wisdom and vulnerability." (Glandion W. Carney, Chaplain of the Christian Legal Society)"A weary, waiting world cries out for God-shaped leaders who would serve more than be served, who would find power by laying down power, who would lose their lives for others. In her reflections on the life of Moses, God's radically human and holy friend, Ruth Haley Barton has given us not only a portrait of what sacrificial and redemptive leadership looks like, but has provided

practice for getting there. This is a book to read alone and together. It will encourage and empower us to seek God more deeply, to listen for and embody our innate callings, to stay faithful to our solitary and even lonely journeys in community, and to love God for the long haul." (N. Gordon Cosby, cofounder, The Church of the Saviour, Washington D.C.) "In a landscape littered with leadership books that tinker at the margins of what really matters, Ruth Haley Barton offers us practical guidance to the core of life-changing leadership: spiritual authenticity and health. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* lays bare the ancient truth that great leadership comes from the inside out, and provides a helpful road map for examining and seeking God's transformation of that largely unexamined inner core from which true leadership proceeds. This is a powerful resource for me and my own leadership team." (Gary Haugen, president, International Justice Mission, and author of *Good News About Injustice*) "[This] book has become for me a companion on the way. . . . The author's style is warm and accessible. I like her insights into the inner life of the leader. . . . I am deeply grateful for the helpful practices she describes and recommends. But what draws me even more is that Ruth writes with realness and integrity out of her own intimate experience of the inner journey of a leader. . . . Reading this book will surely help you to be attentive to the God who is the strength of your soul, and the heart of your leadership." (From the foreword by Leighton Ford, founder of the Arrow Leadership program and author of *The Attentive Life*)

Ruth Haley Barton (DD, Northern Seminary) is founding president of the Transforming Center, a spiritual formation ministry to pastors and Christian leaders. A trained spiritual director (Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation), teacher and retreat leader, she has served on the pastoral staff of several churches, including Willow Creek Community Church. A sought-after teacher, preacher and consultant to leadership teams, she is currently adjunct professor of spiritual transformation at Northern Seminary. Educated at Wheaton College, Northern Seminary and Loyola University Chicago Institute for Pastoral Studies, Ruth is the author of numerous books and resources on the spiritual life, including *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, *Sacred Rhythms*, *Longing for More* and *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. She is also the author of an online resource titled *eReflections*, spiritual guidance via e-mail. She contributes regularly to *Conversations: A Forum for Authentic Transformation*. Leighton Ford is President of Leighton Ford Ministries, which seeks to help young leaders worldwide to lead more like Jesus and more to Jesus. For many years, Ford communicated Christ around the globe through speaking, writing and media outreach, addressing millions of people in thirty-seven countries on every continent. He served from 1955 until 1985 as

Associate Evangelist and later Vice President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and was featured as the alternate speaker to Billy Graham on the Hour of Decision broadcast. Ford describes his current mission to be "an artist of the soul and a friend on the journey." He served for nearly twenty years as chairman of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, an international body of Christian leaders. He chairs the Sandy Ford Fund and has served as a board member for World Vision U. S., the Duke University Comprehensive Cancer Center, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He received the 1990 Two Hungers Award, recognizing his contributions to addressing the physical and spiritual hungers of people around the world. In 1985 he was selected as Clergyman of the Year by Religious Heritage of America and TIME Magazine singled him out as being "among the most influential preachers of an active gospel." The author or co-author of numerous books, including *Transforming Leadership* and *The Attentive Life*, Ford lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his wife Jean.

As a minister, we deal with a variety of issues. There is the normal stress in leadership within a congregation. Often this creates an interesting paradox because you are called to lead, but the perspective in some congregations is that the minister is not a leader. Any time you have paradox within a system, it will create stress within the person caught in the middle of the confusion. Because of this reality, it is wise to invest your time in leadership development. There are numerous books to help the minister to improve leadership skills, but this book is excellent because it deals with the soul of your leadership. It is a first priority message. If your soul is weak, your ministry will fall. As a preacher, you must be careful about not being so busy working that you stop growing in your walk with the Lord. This is probably one of the best books for ministers that I have read in years. It was encouraging, wakening, and insightful. As a minister, it is so essential that we spent time in this area. You can become so focused on activity that you forget the soul in your leadership. The book is filled with insight: "Taking responsibility for oneself may well be more demanding than taking responsibility for a congregation or an organization! Whether it happens early or late, it is crucial to our capacity to lead spiritually." "Many of us are choosing to live lives that do not set us up to pay attention, to notice those places where God is at work and to ask ourselves what these things mean. We long for a word from the Lord, but somehow we have been suckered into believing that the pace we keep is what leadership requires. We slide inexorably into a way of life that offers little or no opportunity for paying attention and then wonder why we are not hearing from God when we need God most." Here is a great insight into leadership for a minister. It is in reference to Moses leading his people out of slavery. The people will follow you because you have met me. Because

you know my name deep in your being. That is what qualifies you to be a spiritual leader, and that is why people will be willing to follow you right out of the place they have known for so long to a place that is brand-new." The book deals with the life of Moses to provide important lessons. Here is a crucial thought. Rather than the brash, impulsive, take-matters-into-my-own-hands kind of leader that he once tried to be, he is now someone who is able to offer a deeply spiritual response in the face of grave danger. He knows that his soul is not going to be strengthened by getting caught up in the people's fears and complaints." Here is another gem. "Self-differentiated leadership always triggers sabotage which is a systemic part of leadership—so much so that a leader can never assume success merely because he or she had brought about change. It is only after having first brought about change and then subsequently endured the resultant sabotage that the leader can feel truly successful. When the sabotage comes, this is the moment when the leader is most likely to experience a failure of nerve and seek a quick fix." This is truly a great book about leadership, not because it provides resources or tools, but because he deals with the core of leadership, your soul's health.

This is a "must read" for pastors. The life and ministry of Moses is an excellent choice, which she develops well. I often incorporate excerpts from this book and recommend it while leading retreats and workshops for clergy. Barton understands the soul-drain that can happen to pastors if they do not have solid spiritual practices. However, this book is more than a teaching on spiritual practices. Barton addresses issues and motives and pitfalls most pastors encounter. She provides plenty of meat to chew on, while also giving hope and solid guidance for perseverance in ministry.

"Strengthening the soul of our leadership is an invitation that begins, continues and ends with seeking God in the crucible of ministry. It is an invitation to stay connected with our own soul - that very private place where God's Spirit and my spirit dwell together in union - and to lead from that place" (210). Barton acknowledges that spiritual leadership is similar to any other kind of leadership in that it is susceptible to the failings of burnout and the weakness of human nature. Without the proper care for themselves and their relationships with Christ, pastoral and ministry leaders can fail in their task of being spiritual leaders. Instead of leading spiritually, they may lead from their own strengths, weaknesses, understanding, wisdom, and draw from their own resources. This will result in tragedy in their lives and in the lives of those who follow them as spiritual leaders. Barton calls spiritual leaders to engage in a process of spiritual discipline that will allow them to reconnect with the divine presence in their lives and then be able to lead from that connection, with benefits for

themselves and those they lead. Using the story of Moses, Barton sketches a process of encountering God through the practice of certain spiritual disciplines, such as solitude, silence, awareness of God's activity, Sabbath rest, and intercessory prayer. Along the way Barton addresses topics such as understanding one's calling, understanding one's own spiritual journey so as to help others on theirs, building healthy ministry teams of interdependent people, and how those teams can exercise the gift of discernment so they can do God's will together. In *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton uncovers a deep need within ministerial leadership, one that can often go unspoken: the very lack of spirituality among those who are entrusted by congregations to be spiritual leaders. Theological Education has emphasized the importance of seminarians learning Biblical languages, content and backgrounds, as well as hermeneutics, church history, systematic theologies, and the basics of pastoral care. Often left out of the curriculum entirely is spiritual formation. It is as if seminaries assume this will take place in the life of the seminarian on its own or in the context of local church involvement and therefore should not be attended to in the context of academic pursuits. As a result it is possible for a ministerial leader to be equipped with a world-class theological education but still not have the capacity to understand and interpret his or her own spiritual journey, and therefore have no clue how to lead others on theirs. The ramifications of this could include burnout in the life of the minister and spiritual drift or drought in the congregation in which that minister serves. Barton outlines a process to help spiritual leaders renew or refresh their own souls, for their own benefit and the benefit of those they lead. Her suggestions provide an excellent starting place to engage in the practice of spiritual disciplines. Pastors, ministry leaders, and others can benefit immediately from reading the chapters and working through the suggested exercises. While Barton does provide an excellent starting point, in essence that is all she accomplishes - an argument for ministry leaders to pay attention to this crucial area in their lives and a way to begin strengthening the soul of their leadership. It is possible that Barton's other books will provide further direction for pursuing spiritual disciplines. Another good resource for spiritual leaders to turn to for further growth in this area would be Richard Foster's classic work *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1998). Beyond the issue of spiritual formation and discipline, Barton touches on several topics of interest to ministerial leaders, including an understanding of calling and issues surrounding leading ministry teams. One area of note is the chapter on discernment. Barton writes, "At the heart of spiritual leadership and spiritual journeying is discernment - the capacity to recognize and respond to the presence and the activity of God both personally and in community" (192-93). Ministerial leaders are taught issues related to church polity and governance and how to lead

business meetings following Robert's Rules of Order. In many cases, churches and ministry teams making important decisions will claim that Christ is the head and therefore their leader, but then will engage in an orderly process of discussions and votes where the majority rules. But how can they know if Christ is leading or simply the majority? Barton argues for spiritual leaders to be fluent in the art of spiritual discernment and how to lead groups of God's people to know and follow God's leading. She also outlines a possible process for leading a group to discern the will of the Lord when making decisions. Barton's suggestions may be provocative and humbling for leaders who have not given attention to spiritual discernment. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* is well written, easy to read, with penetrating insights not only on the life of Moses but also on the implications of the biblical record for contemporary spiritual leadership. Barton's personal examples from her own spiritual journey are relevant and encouraging. The book is a refreshing addition to the many voices on spiritual or ministerial leadership.

Finally, a Christian leadership book that focuses on the leader's ongoing relationship with God rather than another 200 pages of "strategies" for growing a church and surviving in ministry. While there are helpful exercises designed to reconnect the reader to the divine, people in search of the latest and greatest leadership fad will be disappointed (and that's a good thing.) Using the story of Moses as framework for her text, Barton boils the walk of spiritual leadership down to it's most fundamental level; the ongoing, growing relationship between a human being and the God of the universe. This is a refreshing book I would highly recommend to any Christian in a leadership position, clergy or otherwise.

Excellent as described. I recommend this.

A book encouraging to focus on the Lord and listen to Him in leadership. Worthy of reading and personal reflection.

I am in a season of life where the "traditional" view of leadership are changing for me. I am now much more aware of the need of paying attention to my inner life as a leader and not be as focused on the external aspects. A book that I am re-reading and will re-read.

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