

Book Review: The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You

by Carrie Cavanaugh



The Me I want to Be, by John Ortberg, is an inspirational read! Although the book presents a tried and true list of spiritual disciplines, it goes beyond that to set our eyes on the bigger things that God is doing in and through us. I found it a helpful exercise to review the truths about how God reveals Himself to us and why—in the busy world of ministry and business it's too easy to get caught up in doing and not take time for the relationship with our creator that makes it all meaningful.

John Ortberg is a pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in northern California. He has authored numerous other books and is the father of three. His educational background includes both theological and psychological degrees and he has served as a pastor for the past twenty years, making him well equipped to address issues of spiritual formation.

Although Ortberg covers the classics of Christian growth, he does stretch the modern sensibilities about what they look like. For example, he explains,

Why is it that the psalms are so full of human anger, that they

express so much raw, unfiltered hostility and lust for vengeance and fury and demand for divine justice to come pretty quickly—and that the prayers prayed in church feel so . . . Well,

In the great tradition of reformed theology, Ortberg includes work within the realm of worship—that is the God-glorifying nature of vocation.

decaffeinated? Is it possible that God could actually handle our anger?

This passage is near the end of the chapter entitled “Be Human” which deals with the necessity of tearing down facades in our interactions. How refreshing it is to know that we can be real with God and honest with each other about how we feel—that there is a place for righteous anger. Sure this requires a lot more wisdom and struggle than the usual denial of any negative emotions, but it's clearly the biblical stance.

In the great tradition of reformed theology, Ortberg includes work within the realm of worship—that

is the God-glorifying nature of vocation. Two chapters focus in on how work can be a place of spiritual growth: “Let God Flow in Your Work” and “Let Your Work Honor God.” In the latter, he paraphrases Paul, saying,

The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work.

It's all too easy to lower the bar when working in a ministry setting where grace is emphasized and people are often paid less, but Ortberg rightly reminds us that just the opposite should be the case. Whether in a Christian organization or a secular one, paid or volunteer, we ultimately are working for our heavenly master and therefore should strive for excellence. The vision statement of the Best Christian Workplaces puts it this way, “Christian Workplaces set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.” We need to realize that our work is part of our witness to the world.

One of my favorite chapters is entitled, “You Have to Go Through Exile Before You Come Back Home.” In trying to share the beauty of the gospel, it's easy to get caught up in painting a picture of

Book Review: The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You

by Carrie Cavanaugh



health and happiness, but not only does reality reveal something different, but God's love dictates it. Ortberg does a superb job of showing how pain and suffering are part of God's loving work at refining our souls. He further argues that it is in the moments of struggle that we have the greatest opportunity to exercise our faith:

When circumstances look bleak, when the stock market is down, or when your morale is sinking or your assets are shrinking or your health is collapsing, you may wonder, *Is anything going up?*

Yes.

The chance to trust God when trusting isn't easy is wide open. The prospect for modeling hope for a hope-needy world is trending upward. And the possibility of cultivating a storm-proof faith is always going up. This is so because certain truths remain unchanged; God remains sovereign, grace beats sin, prayers get heard, the Bible endures, heaven's mercies spring up new every morning, the cross still testifies to the power of sacrificial love, the tomb is still empty, and the kingdom that Jesus announced is still expanding without needing to be bailed out by human efforts.

We are not called to be masochists, but with this perspective it is possible to walk with grace through trials, knowing that they are

opportunities for faith and that no matter how much circumstances around us scream otherwise, the truths of who God is and what He has done and will do can never be altered.

One thing I would have liked this book to emphasize more is the reason for spiritual development—the joy of beholding God's beauty. Although all of the suggestions as to how we can know God more are valid, I finished the book feeling like it was more about me than it was about the object of our devotion. I know that our feelings shift as waves in the sea and there is a time and place to faithfully practice the spiritual disciplines even when they may not seem exciting, but I also know that our God is so perfectly beautiful, good and wise that if Ortberg had exposed us more to His character, his suggested means of drawing near to God would have happened organically.

The book also features a free online diagnostic of your personal growth tendencies. Although this is a wonderful idea, it is a fairly simple evaluation and serves as a lead in to purchasing a personalized online spiritual growth tutorial. I found

the material in the book to be sufficient in giving me ideas on how to continue my personal spiritual growth and furthermore, a renewed sense of just why that is so important. For leaders of Christian organizations, this book will be a great resource on how to rejuvenate their spiritual growth as well as how they can spur others under their authority on to greater depths of love of their Savior.