Review of "Spiritual Waypoints: Helping Others Navigate the Journey" by Bob Whitesel

By Bob Whitesel
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Journey -- from time immemorial writers have employed this metaphor to bear the weight of meaning for their ideas. From Robert Frost’s "The Road Not Taken" to Scott and Russell’s song "He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother," journey has found constant employment. To the phrase, "life is a journey," auto-makers and airline companies place their taglines: "travel it well" (United) or "enjoy the ride" (Nissan). Isaac Asimov wrote one of my favorite twists on the journey metaphor "Life is a journey, but don’t worry, you’ll find a parking spot at the end.

But what of the Christian journey. Who provides aid in navigating its path? We’ve borrowed the phrase "life’s a journey not a destination" from the lyrics to Aerosmith’s song "Amazing" to describe the Christian experience, but can’t we do more than borrow catch-phrases and the latest slogans for our service?

At least one author has responded to these questions, Bob Whitesel. In his book *Spiritual Waypoints*, Whitesel highlights key markers or waypoints located at strategic points of one’s journey toward and with Jesus Christ. Whitesel points out the advantage of using waypoints while journeying to a destination.

A waypoint is a position, not a phase or a frozen marker. It tells where a traveler is in relation to other features on the road. He also points out that a waypoint may be different for each trekker. He offers no single, canned approach to relating to people on the journey. Instead, Whitesel provides a variety of options that may be adapted by individual churches.

The Engle and Clinton Models

In the past, many clergy were exposed to the Engle scale when introduced to evangelism methodology. The Engle scale is a model that visualizes a spiritual journey along a continuum. This continuum begins with the negative number eight and ends with the positive number five. Each number represents a stage of spiritual decision. For example a negative eight(-8) represents "Awareness of a supreme being, no knowledge of gospel." A -1 represents "Repentance and faith in Christ." Some traditional approaches to evangelism emphasized focusing more attention on people closer to the repentance stage to maximize the probability of evangelistic "success." Sadly, people on the extreme negative side of the Engle scale were routinely avoided. It is this type of short-sighted approach to evangelism that *Spiritual Waypoints* corrects.

A second model used to chart spiritual maturation is Robert Clinton’s "Six Phases of Leadership Development." In each of these six phases, Clinton describes the "what" and "how" of spiritual development in an individual.
A Synthesized Model

Whitesel combines Engle’s Eight Stages of Spiritual Decision and Robert Clinton’s Six Phases of Leadership Development to produce his synthesized Spiritual Waypoints Model. This model provides sixteen distinct waypoints that guide the reader in determining the spiritual location of an individual. At each point, Whitesel shares practical suggestions about how to recognize and assist travelers on their spiritual journey.

In a lecture on his book, Whitesel noted that while many highly evangelistic churches have typically shied away from a "negative eight" on the Engle scale, there are ways to get the attention of such individuals. Surprisingly, he pointed to the efforts of "community outreach churches" that participated in social outreach. Through their charitable acts, these churches introduced God’s grace to people who were most antagonistic toward God. Despite initial antagonism, even the most hardened soul may take notice of kindness. This experience will pave the way for later receptivity of God’s grace in that individual.

By providing insights into what spiritual travelers are experiencing at each waypoint, churches can help such people negotiate their way toward Christ. The sixteen-point continuum provides a visual for churches to consult and assess how well they are doing to relate to people at all points of their spiritual journey. Many find that their church focuses on people only at certain points of the spiritual journey, but neglects people at other points. That occurs, says Whitesel, "because church leaders are largely unaware of the next phase of the spiritual traveler’s spiritual development."

The Perils of Narrow Band Ministry

The neglect of the next phase in a spiritual traveler’s journey causes gaps. It means that a church is offering only a narrow band of ministry. When churches offer a narrow band of ministry, Whitesel notes "they can force the spiritual traveler to sever fellowship with one faith community in search of another that will take them to the next stage of spiritual development."

Pastors and laity who are serious about developing a church culture that excels at evangelism and discipleship will benefit from reading this book. Pastors and laity alike would be well-served to become familiar with the descriptions and accompanying ministry strategies contained in the Spiritual Waypoints model. I agree with what one reviewer says about *Spiritual Waypoints*: "It will forever change the way you go about fulfilling the great commission."

Related Resources:

*Spiritual Waypoints*

*Engle Scale Explained*

*The Making of a Leader* by Robert Clinton

*The Making of a Leader Review PDF*

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