

Book Reviews

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Through Painted Deserts: Light, God and Beauty on the Open Road

by Donald Miller (Nelson Books)

The first shall be fourth, and the fourth shall hopefully not be the last. In Donald Miller's third book, Searching for God Knows What, he mentions the lack of readership his first book generated. I was disappointed to learn this new fourth book is simply a re-edit of his first. Consequently, if you're a Miller fan based on his acclaimed Blue Like Jazz, as I am, you'll quickly sense that Through Painted Desert is really "early Miller" before he found his edgier, postmodern voice.

That being said, this road trip memoir, which journals his escape from hometown Houston to find himself, is like any road trip, spent mostly in some long stretches of predictable characters and well-traveled inspirational landscape. Occasionally though, Miller stops off at a scenic spiritual overlook that is quite memorable. The author shines when he is unpacking a metaphor for God, such as light, in some ways that use both poetry and physics to create a theological reflection that opens up some interesting new vistas on the mystery of God. Similarly, when I read aloud a particularly moving passage that explores the finitude of life, it brought tears to the eyes of some in my Bible study group.



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While his thoughts on prayer seem somewhat naïve to me (e.g. God gets credit for answering a prayer to fix the broken-down van with no seeming awareness of the theological problems such pedestrian interventions create for those with far greater suffering), his reflections on issues such as our universal search for meaning seem far more mature. If you're looking for a book that will take you to a more reflective place on your own quest for meaning and the freedom to be your best self, you'll find some inspiration here. But if you're hungering after Miller's next postmodern take on what it means to be an emergent Christian, you'll have to wait for his next book.

Brad Russell, pastor

The Springs Church

San Antonio

Finding God's Vision: Missions and the New Realities by Bill Tinsley (Veritas)



Global change is obvious—just talk to your Indian tech-support guy. Yet we cherish our sense of continuity and control. Bill Tinsley, head of World-conneX, argues change is real and unavoidable. But he adds that the “new realities” yield a new missions opportunity. We may resent change, but the kingdom payoff is great.

Tinsley talks about factors like the drive to connect and the marriage of business and missions. Business people witness where missionaries can't go. The desire for personal connection means churches increasingly prefer direct support of and trips to specific mission locales in the place of budgeted contributions to large, anonymous agencies. I would add that the new openness to spirituality, despite its risks, makes our message more hearable; and that the new awareness of world religions means they will listen to us if we will listen to them.

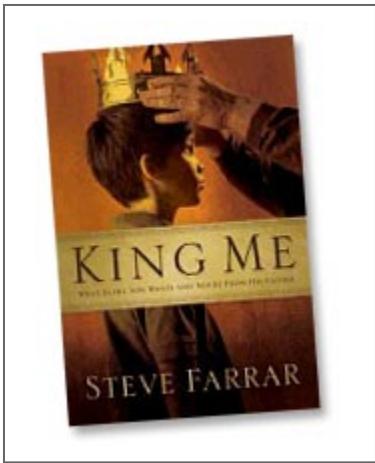
Like it or not, denominational life and ways of doing mission are changing. Tinsley makes a careful, restrained case for this in a book that is accessible to lay leaders as well as pastors and staff.

Mark Thames, pastor

Lower Greenville Community Church

Dallas

King Me: What Every Son Wants and Needs From His Father by Steve Farrar (Moody)



Steve Farrar, former pastor, popular speaker, and author of the widely read book, Point Man, presents in his newest work, King Me, a strong case for the intentional commitment of fathers to raise truly masculine, godly sons. Farrar's book does not merely challenge Christian fathers, but provides a "how to" manual for getting the job done.

King Me is unapologetically about fathers and sons. With a study of the ancient Old Testament kings as his background, Farrar underscores God's unchanging principles for preparing boys and young men to enter adulthood but adds modern application and anecdotes.

The reader may not fully agree with his theology or glittering generalities ("When a boy is mentored by women or raised primarily by women, then that boy will become almost certainly feminized"), but anyone who reads the book must acknowledge Farrar's deep passion for challenging today's fathers to rear godly sons in an environment that is increasingly hostile to basic Christian tenets.

The writer is honest about his own failures as a father ("And I'm the guy who's supposed to have the answers because I write books to men. I didn't know snot.")

His candidness serves as an invitation for the reader to identify with his emotional struggles as a father and gives hope to ordinary men who may

feel overwhelmed by the task of fatherhood.

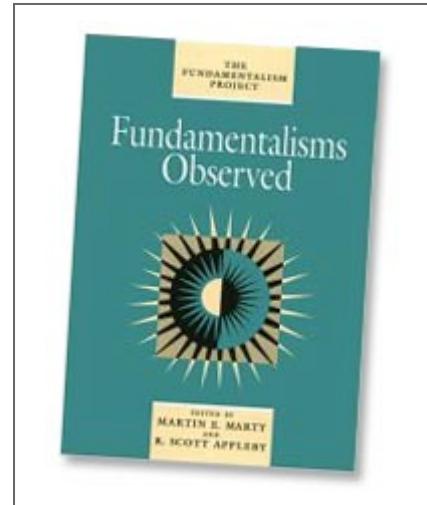
Farrar, in this book, is at his best.

At times humorous, and occasionally “in your face” confrontational, he has written a book that America's fathers need to read. America's preachers need to read it, too.

Charles Walton, pastor

First Baptist Church

Conroe



Fundamentalism Observed, the first of five volumes of the University of Chicago Fundamentalism Project, directed by Martin Marty and Scott Appleby (University of Chicago Press)

I have all five volumes-around 3,500 pages in total-and am sure that on my deathbed, I'll still be working my way through this report. I'm convinced fundamentalism-and I do not use the term pejoratively, only descriptively-is the under-reported story of my time. It is imperative that journalists-and particularly opinion writers-understand this sweeping and

worldwide movement.

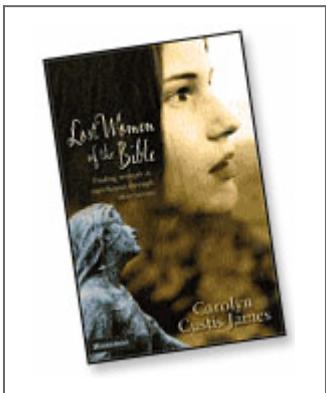
Paul K. Harral, editorial page editor

Star-Telegram

Member, Broadway Baptist Church

Fort Worth

Lost Women of the Bible by Carolyn Custis James (Zondervan)



I am reading this book because I heard the author at a women's meeting and was intrigued by her first book, When Faith and Life Collide, theology for women. This new book is one in which she asks the questions that women of today ask of themselves, and she tries to see if the women we know in Scripture have relevant answers for us. I thought it was an interesting approach. Her title refers to women searching for their identity and place, not the forgotten or ignored women of the Bible.

Patty Lane, director

Intercultural Initiatives

Baptist General Convention of Texas

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