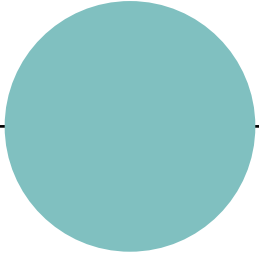
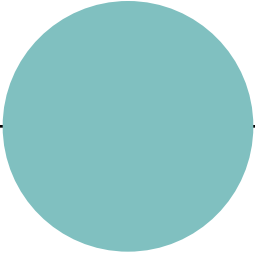


FIVE
THOUSAND
WORDS



CONTENTS

- 3** OUR STORY
- 5** “BECOMING THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS”
- 8** “MONEYBALL: THE ART OF WINNING AN UNFAIR GAME”
- 12** “SPEAKING OF JESUS: THE ART OF NOT-EVANGELISM”
- 15** “MONOCULTURE: HOW ONE STORY IS CHANGING EVERYTHING”
- 17** “READ THIS BEFORE OUR NEXT MEETING”



OUR STORY

READING WAS ONE OF the things John Wesley thought was very important. The saddle bags of those first itinerate, or traveling, ministers were full of not only scriptures, but books of all kinds. The breadth of literature is deep in the Methodist tradition, and “Five Thousand Words” is an attempt to bring that tradition into today.

Early itinerate ministers read books as they road on horseback from parish to parish. The rides were long and slow, and books could be easily read en route.

The diversity of books at our disposal, the demands of living in our time and the distractions of our modern life can render us unable to keep up with the stacks of books we have at our bedside. “Five Thousand Words” is an attempt to help expose us to more books in less time.

HOW IT WORKS:

Each edition of “Five Thousand Words” has five contributors, each of who have read a book of his or her choosing. Additionally, each contributor is then limited to two pages (one thousand words) to reflect and respond to standard questions.

Each edition of “Five Thousand Words” has five submissions from five different books. Each submission is limited to one thousand words to reflect and respond to standard questions. The Challenge section expresses the things the submitter was challenged by in the book. The Integration section is how the submitter applied the book to the local church or theology. The Additional Resources section is a jumping off point for you to explore more related to topic at hand.

Finally, these contributions have been edited for ease of reading and navigation, so you can quickly assess if “that one book you heard about” is worth your time to read or not.

“EACH EDITION OF “FIVE THOUSAND WORDS” HAS FIVE SUBMISSIONS FROM FIVE DIFFERENT BOOKS.”

HOW TO BECOME A CONTRIBUTOR:

Email your interest to CTCFIVETHOUSAND@GMAIL.COM



KATIE MEEK

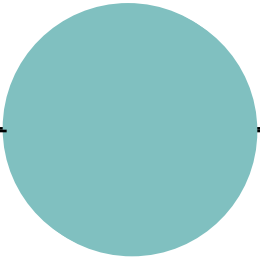
KATIE MEEK serves as the Pastor of Bethel United Methodist Church in Weatherford, Texas and Director of the Wesley Foundation at Weatherford College.

She's an (almost) lifelong United Methodist who has previously served as Youth Director at Palmer United Methodist Church and interned in the Office of Hispanic Ministries of the Central Texas Conference.

She holds a degree in Christian Education from Texas Wesleyan University and a Master of Divinity from Brite Divinity School (Texas Christian University).

“BECOMING THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS”

REVIEW BY: KATIE MEEK



TITLE: BECOMING THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS

AUTHOR: Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

GENRE: Christian living, non-fiction

TARGET AUDIENCE: People learning how to be Christian in a postmodern world

YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK IF

You're spiritually restless

OVERVIEW

The thesis of “Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers” is that prayer and action must go hand in hand. When you divorce prayer and action, what results is either “inactive believers” or “worn-out activists”. The book follows Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove’s sometimes rambling thoughts and experiences in pursuit of being people who not only pray but also act on the substance of those prayers. Along the way, the reader gets to see what faithful Christianity looks like in the transitional religious climate in which the church lives today. This book is both inspiring and profound, with a

quotable insight around every corner.

CHALLENGE

There are two quotes that I’d like to share that have already begun to take root in my thinking and produce fruit.

“One of my (Shane) mentors once told me ‘Beware of the almost good, for if the devil can’t get you to do bad things, he will get you to settle for the almost good, just short of the good that God has for you.’ And if the tempter can’t steal our soul, perhaps he will just keep us busy with ‘important’ work that pulls us away from community, reconciliation and living.” (p 45)

So often in the church we settle for the almost good. We do events that bear some fruit. We keep ourselves busy

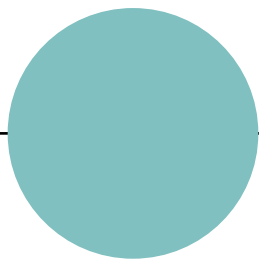
with activities that show some success. But in my experience we rarely ask if God is calling us to more. The good to which I believe God is most often calling us is the kind of thing

“SO OFTEN IN THE CHURCH WE SETTLE FOR THE ALMOST GOOD. WE DO EVENTS THAT BEAR SOME FRUIT. WE KEEP OURSELVES BUSY WITH ACTIVITIES THAT SHOW SOME SUCCESS. BUT IN MY EXPERIENCE WE RARELY ASK IF GOD IS CALLING US TO MORE.”

that gets our hands dirty; the kind of thing that is messy and

“BECOMING THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS”

REVIEW BY: KATIE MEEK



involved; the kind of thing that will disrupt your life; the kind of thing that doesn't necessary promote "church" but rather builds up the Kingdom. As a pastor, I often get into a "good-enough" mentality where the almost good is something that I settle for. I often think that if I serve the church then that's good enough. I don't talk too much about the devil, but I do believe that there are forces (most often within myself) that sabotage the messy, fulfilled, redeeming life God has set out for us. But to follow Jesus—I mean really follow Jesus—is to commit deeply to the good things of God.

“Predictably, some will say it's absurd to assert that we are the answer to our prayer because God is the only answer to prayer. That's the beautiful mystery: we have a God who chooses to need us. We have a God who doesn't want to change the world without us.” (p 117)

This quote certainly puts life into perspective. God needs us. God chooses to need us. This is the character of the God that we serve—a God who longs for the community of God's

own creation and empowers that community with a spirit of redemption and hope. This beautiful thought certainly makes me want to be more open to God's leading.

INTEGRATION

In this book, the authors introduce the idea of a “relational tithe.” The relational tithe is a pool of money modeled after the early Christian movement when people gave what extra they had to take care of those in their community. A group of friends offers ten percent of their income and pools it together to give it away as needed. The tithe is grounded in relationship. Money is offered and received in friendship. I have done some maneuvering in my budget (and life) to start something akin to a relational tithe. I am currently in the beginning stages of getting this going, so I have no stories to share or testimonies to give. I just know that for me, becoming more Kingdom-focused concerning how I use my money seems a good place to start in striving with others to become the answer to our prayers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“FOLLOW ME TO FREEDOM”

By Shane Claiborne and John Perkins

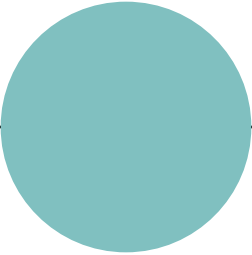
“CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINE”

By Richard Foster

United Methodist Church of the Resurrection **SERMON PODCAST**



KYLE ROBERSON



KYLE ROBERSON has fifteen years of youth ministry experience within congregations of The United Methodist Church and five years of experience working with students and young adults within the context of higher education.

His professional goal is to advance youth and young people (and those who work with them) into places of greatest leadership potential by facilitating opportunities for authentic experiences with God and providing an honest witness to a life as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Kyle's top five strengths are ideation, futuristic, strategic, restorative, connectedness. He likes to read anything that informs or expands his understanding of these areas of his personality in regards to ministry. (For more information about Strengths visit STRENGTHS.GALLUP.COM)



“MONEYBALL: THE ART OF WINNING AN UNFAIR GAME”

REVIEW BY: KYLE ROBERSON

TITLE: MONEYBALL: THE ART OF WINNING AN UNFAIR GAME

AUTHOR: Michael Lewis

GENRE: Non-fiction

TARGET AUDIENCE: Baseball fans, management-types, senior pastors, church professionals, anyone in volunteer/personnel development

YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK IF

Admittedly, you must be a bit of a baseball nerd to understand the truly radical nature of what this organization accomplishes under a new vision of evaluating players.

You should also read this book if you are a pastor, church professional, volunteer, or lay member who is tired of reading the conventional material on church growth and are searching for a new way of looking at discipleship/leadership development.

OVERVIEW

This is a cautionary tale of accepting “conventional wisdom” couched in the story of the redevelopment

of the Oakland A’s baseball organization in the 1990s–2000s under General Manager Billy Beane and his assistant, Paul DePodesta.

CHALLENGE

It reminded me that though outcomes are important, the process that produces those outcomes is equally important. This book reminds us that in order to influence outcomes you must re-envision your situation with a great deal of creativity and innovation while pouring energy and prayer into the process of player/personnel development.

In the church, we are not often handed superstars. We need to see unique possibilities in unique people. We must work diligently in developing players first, then developing those

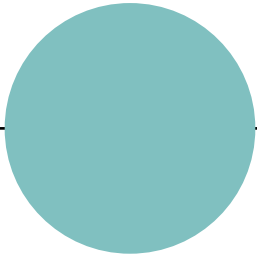
players into leaders. It is the difference between throwing people into the deep end and encouraging them to swim, versus wading in with them. We need an encouraging and supportive development model that not only teaches players to swim, but equips them with the ability to teach others.

INTEGRATION

Many churches, at one time or another, are a little like the Oakland A’s—high expectations from management and fans and often a scarce amount of resources to perform at such a high level. We are not often equipped with the “dream team” of volunteers or staff to accomplish our ministry and must find potential in the resources we possess. With that in mind, we can integrate ideas from the characters in

“MONEYBALL: THE ART OF WINNING AN UNFAIR GAME”

REVIEW BY: KYLE ROBERSON



this story and the archetypes they represent.

I look at Billy Beane as a senior pastor or member of the episcopacy, someone who has played the game himself, who sees the potential of players and personnel in new ways based on his own experience

“**THOUGH OUTCOMES ARE IMPORTANT, THE PROCESS THAT PRODUCES THOSE OUTCOMES IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT. IN ORDER TO INFLUENCE OUTCOMES YOU MUST RE-ENVISION YOUR SITUATION WITH A GREAT DEAL OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION.”**

within the game as a player and coach. Beane bucks the accepted conventional wisdom of baseball the same way visionary church leaders buck the conventional wisdom of how to build, manage, and lead the church.

Beane is forced to break away from the conventional wisdom, which in turn breaks his relationships with aged friends and conventional “experts,” in order to build a team that has a chance of success. This choice to break from the conventional wisdom of relying on the superstitions and unfounded biases of aged scouts and baseball insiders alienates him not only from his own scouts, front office, and fans but also alienates him from the larger organization of the game of baseball (other owners and GMs, managers, coaches, and players on other teams).

Often, when church leaders break from those conventional ways of “doing church” based on age-old assumptions and empty traditions (including how they develop and organize leadership), they feel this same alienation from those under their leadership and within the larger organization. Like the story of Beane and the A’s, it is not until these unconventional ideas begin producing fruit that they are seen as success stories.

Another character/name you might recognize in the book is

Texas Rangers’ skipper Ron Washington, who was the infield coach for the Oakland A’s at the time the book was written. I look at Washington as the senior pastor or associate who is tasked with the unenviable task of unlocking the potential of the personnel he’s given (a veritable “island of misfit toys”) and accomplishing the desired outcome: to field a team that can win games. The most evident of these projects is outlined in the chapter Scott Hatteberg: Pickin’ Machine where Washington is tasked with turning the catcher, Hatteberg, into a first baseman. Washington begrudgingly transforms players previously tagged “unusable” or “washed up” by enabling them, supporting them, and encouraging them to use their unique talents to produce success.

Time and time again, Washington and Beane are told that they cannot do what they are attempting, based on baseball “wisdom.” Time and time again, Beane, DePodesta, Washington, and others within the A’s organization prove this “wisdom” wrong.



“MONEYBALL: THE ART OF WINNING AN UNFAIR GAME”

REVIEW BY: KYLE ROBERSON

In a new afterword, Lewis acknowledges the limit at which you can measure the true success of the Oakland A's in terms of winning games, because their record over the years is not stellar. However, looking over the landscape of baseball and the way front offices have changed their approach to player development and team-building, you cannot dispute the success Beane and the A's philosophy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

You might like to see the movie of the same name, based on this book, starring Brad Pitt and Jonah Hill. You might also want to watch the Texas Rangers closely, the way they play, the moves they make personnel-wise, and the way they do business because they put a great deal of the principles the book introduces into play.

You might also like to read other books by Michael Lewis including his wildly popular “THE BLIND SIDE” (which was also made into a movie with Sandra Bullock) as well as:

- “LIAR’S POKER” (re: investment banking)
- “THE BIG SHORT” (re: the US housing crisis)
- “COACH” (re: the life principles revealed in the art of coaching)
- “BOOMERANG” (re: the US financial crisis)
- For hardcore baseball nerds, check out “THE NEW BILL JAMES HISTORICAL BASEBALL ABSTRACT.”



STEVE HEYDUCK

STEVE IS AN ELDER currently serving as Chaplain at the Methodist Children's Home in Waco, Texas. He has been itinerating all his life; first as the son of a Navy officer, then as a student, and, for the last 22 years, as a pastor.

Steve felt called to ministry as a youth who had been found by God at a United Methodist congregation; he thinks this might be why he remains passionate about youth ministry today.

Because he didn't like to read when he was younger, Steve

now finds reading meaningful only when he can translate it into terms for others who might not like to read. He is passionate about learning and discussing anything that might help make disciples of Jesus Christ. He blogs regularly at NONCON.WORDPRESS.COM.



“SPEAKING OF JESUS: THE ART OF NOT-EVANGELISM”

REVIEW BY: STEVE HEYDUCK

TITLE: SPEAKING OF JESUS: THE ART OF NOT-EVANGELISM

AUTHOR: Carl Medearis

GENRE: Ecumenism, Apologetics, Evangelism

TARGET AUDIENCE: Pastors, Christians

YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK IF

You are interested in a perspective on the Gospel that doesn't pit evangelism versus respect of others.

OVERVIEW

Carl Medearis is a pastor and follower of Jesus. He wants the world to know Jesus. He is convinced that if people are introduced to Jesus, they will be willing, even eager, to learn from him and follow his ways. Having lived in Lebanon for 12 years, he is also a leader in Arab-American and Muslim-Christian relations. Speaking of Jesus is his invitation to the rest of us who follow Jesus to “quit defending Christianity” and begin inviting people to follow Jesus along with us. In one sense this is another

book in a long (and recent) line of “they love Jesus but hate the Church” books. Since I haven't read any of the others, I offer this one as a good one to read, if you only read one.

Medearis invites all of us who follow Jesus to reclaim our Lord and Savior at the expense of defending the Church, organized religion, or institutional Christianity. Though I grew up in the Church, I did not feel beat up by Medearis' characterization so much as encouraged that Jesus is really what each of us, at one time or another, found endearing and attractive about this faith.

The author has extensive positive experience sharing Jesus, his life and teachings, with those of other faiths and no faith. In each shared

experience, Jesus is shared openly and inoffensively.

“Jesus didn't come to build a

“**MEDEARIS INVITES ALL OF US WHO FOLLOW JESUS TO RECLAIM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR AT THE EXPENSE OF DEFENDING THE CHURCH, ORGANIZED RELIGION, OR INSTITUTIONAL CHRISTIANITY.”**

Kingdom. He brought one with him.” Simpler, clearer words have rarely been spoken, yet this line near the middle of the book captures Medearis' overall



“SPEAKING OF JESUS: THE ART OF NOT-EVANGELISM”

REVIEW BY: STEVE HEYDUCK

intent: to invite us to join Jesus and to share Jesus.

CHALLENGE

Medearis takes on the “us versus them” conflict, that characterizes so much inter-religious talk, from several different angles. I really appreciated the variety of ways he shares that it comes down to Jesus: not beliefs, not reason, not “winning.”

INTEGRATION

Speaking of Jesus is challenging and reaffirming. I feel like I’ve got this theology and Jesus stuff down in my head. I know the answers to most questions. I am smooth and quick with words that fit the situation. Yet I am increasingly aware this is not what most people are looking for.

Medearis challenged me to offer Jesus rather than reason and compassion rather than passion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“THE NATURE OF LOVE: A THEOLOGY”

By Thomas Jay Oord

“THE BLUE PARAKEET”

By Scot McKnight

“CHANGE THE WORLD”

By Mike Slaughter



JASON VALENDY



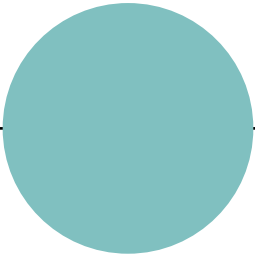
JASON IS AN ELDER currently serving as an associate minister at Arlington Heights/ Grace UMC in Fort Worth, Texas. His wife, Estee, is also clergy in The United Methodist Church, serving as associate minister at FUMC of Arlington. They share the responsibilities of raising their son, Jude.

Part of Jason's call into ministry is rooted in the idea that Christians ought to be culture creators and cultivators, rather than just consumers. As a way of living out this calling, he has worked to create Fort Worth Dish Out, a meal-based, micro-granting initiative for local non-profits.

He would love to be a facilitator of research and development ministry in The UMC. He would also love to live on St. John's Island, where he could eat a hearty breakfast while looking over the "New York Times."

“MONOCULTURE: HOW ONE STORY IS CHANGING EVERYTHING”

REVIEW BY: JASON VALENDY



TITLE: MONOCULTURE: HOW ONE STORY IS CHANGING EVERYTHING

AUTHOR: F.S. Michaels

GENRE: Culture, Economics, Non-fiction, Sociology

TARGET AUDIENCE: Those interested in culture at large. Preachers could benefit from this greatly as well as ministers who are seeking to better understand why the Church is often thought of as a business.

YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK IF

You want the Church to be different. You should not read this book if you are okay with the Church operating like a business and the minister operating like a CEO.

OVERVIEW

Michaels argues that while we have been told stories our whole lives, there is one story that is taking over all the other stories in our world. This story, which Michaels calls the Economic Story, has invaded the major areas of our lives: work, relationships, community, health, education, and creativity.

This book argues that all our cultures are merging into one meta-narrative and we all are

operating in the same ways. To be clear, this “doesn’t mean that everyone believes exactly the same thing or acts in exactly the same way, but that we end up sharing key beliefs and assumptions that direct our lives.”

This Economic Story is not exclusively about money, although that is not absent. Rather, this story is centered on a few basic assumptions which are often taken for granted in our time. The Economic Story, in part, suggests that 1) you are an individual who is 2) rational and 3) acts self-interested (as an entrepreneur, not as an egoist) and 4) can never get enough and 5) believes the more choices you have, the better. Additionally the Economic Story “also says that corporate citizenship needs to be justified in economic

terms. A healthy psychological workplace is worth developing—not because we value mental health at work, but because it improves organizational performance.” These are just a few of the characteristics of the Economic Story that is taking over our culture and consuming all other stories. This book is a page turner and one that challenges all of us who desire the Church to be something other than another expression of American ideals whitewashed with some religious rhetoric.

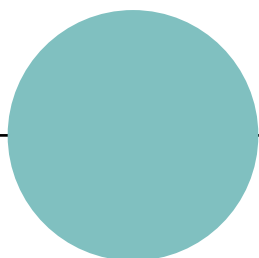
If you would like to see all my highlights you can find them here: [HTTP://AMZN.TO/QU43DL](http://amzn.to/qU43DL)

CHALLENGE

There are several take aways from this book but the largest take away for me was just how “normal” the Economic

“MONOCULTURE: HOW ONE STORY IS CHANGING EVERYTHING”

REVIEW BY: JASON VALENDY



Story feels to me and yet how detrimental it can be in the life of the Church (and even in the world). It is not that this Story is bad or good, but it does point out that if we allow this Story to dictate our lives, it can leave us feeling very cold and creating very efficient churches but ones that lack counter-cultural expressions.

INTEGRATION

Michaels writes: “The Economic Story says that among your own kind, competition matters more than cooperation, and that you’re motivated to look after your own interests, constantly calculating what’s in it for you, just like everyone else. Being a member of a group no longer means that you are part of something bigger than yourself. You participate in different groups not for the sake of the group, but to further your own interests. In turn, the group you’re part of objectively judges you based on your performance and your worth to them, not on your needs or your intrinsic value as a human being.” If the Economic Story is changing the way we think and act in the world then it makes an impact

on why people come to church and why people might not be interested in church. If the Economic Story states that we ought to join something only if there is a personal benefit, then what does this say to those Christians whose faith is based upon a reward system? The idea that an action (saying a prayer or accepting Jesus) is rewarded by going to heaven is a common understanding in Christianity. However, this also sounds like an economic transaction! This book calls us to examine our motivations when it comes to practicing our faith. Is my faith motivated by a reward? Am I a Christian in order to “get something” in return on my “investment”?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“NUMBERS RULE YOUR WORLD: THE HIDDEN INFLUENCE OF PROBABILITIES AND STATISTICS ON EVERYTHING YOU DO”

By Kaiser Fung

“I IS AN OTHER: THE SECRET LIFE OF METAPHOR AND HOW IT SHAPES THE WAY WE SEE THE WORLD”

By James Geary

“IF THE ECONOMIC STORY STATES THAT WE OUGHT TO JOIN SOMETHING ONLY IF THERE IS A PERSONAL BENEFIT, THEN WHAT DOES THIS SAY TO THOSE CHRISTIANS WHOSE FAITH IS BASED UPON A REWARD SYSTEM?”



“READ THIS BEFORE OUR NEXT MEETING”

REVIEW BY: JASON VALENDY

TITLE: READ THIS BEFORE OUR NEXT MEETING

AUTHOR: Al Pittampalli

GENRE: Management, Business, Running meetings, Organizational Behavior, Skills, Leaders and Leadership

TARGET AUDIENCE: Anyone who has ever had the privilege of sitting in a meeting that was going nowhere fast and you wanted to change it. Or anyone who is often in charge of meetings.

YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK IF

You should read this book if you are seeking ways to revitalize your organization. You will get basic tools and rules for conducting meetings in an age for which the traditional meeting kill urgency and abdicate decision making. You really should not read this meeting if you love to have two hour meetings or if you are unwilling to make decisions.

OVERVIEW

Meetings are important, however the meeting culture is changing how we focus, what we focus on and what decisions we make. We no longer have the need for the

standard meeting which falls into three main categories: 1) Convenience meetings (when we want to say something quickly without writing it) 2) Formality meetings (meetings called to give the appearance of control and productivity, which generally pales to the cost of the interruption) and 3) Social meetings (meetings for the purpose of connection).

Most meetings are just another form of communication such as an e-mail or phone call. In the modern meeting world, this is a mistake. Pittampalli goes on to argue that a “meeting” should be used to define a very precise type of session. The modern meeting is a “sacred tool that exists for only one reason: to support decisions.” Meetings are not conversations, group

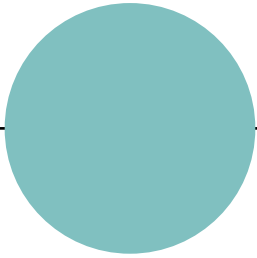
work sessions or brainstorming sessions.

To use a metaphor from Pittampalli, “Meetings need to be less like the endless commercial breaks during a football game, and more like pit stops at the Daytona 500. Sure, even these stops slow momentum, but not for long, and only in service of winning. Quick high-energy transactions to refuel, to change the tires, to allow the driver to do the work better and faster—that’s the type of meeting that people will walk away from with a continued sense of urgency and energized with a feeling of aliveness.”

Pittampalli lays out the “seven principles of the modern meeting” and uses the

“READ THIS BEFORE OUR NEXT MEETING”

REVIEW BY: JASON VALENDY



remaining pages of the book to explain these principles. It is important to note that Pittampalli saves a special place in the book dedicated to the idea of “brainstorming” which is argued as the counter-balance to the meeting.

CHALLENGE

There are many things that I learned in this book, but I will share two of them. First, the “seven principles of the modern meeting”—Modern meetings 1) support decisions that have already been made, 2) move fast and end on time, 3) limit the number of attendees, 4) reject the unprepared, 5) produce committed action plans, 6) refuse to be informational because reading memos are mandatory, and 7) work only alongside a culture of brainstorming.

The second thing I learned in this book was that we often use meetings to delay decisions. Pittampalli’s view of meetings is that in order for meetings to happen there must be a decision that is already made

and meetings are there to support the decision. This means that if you are looking to shift to the modern meeting, it is critical that decision makers make decisions. This takes courage and trust and even a bit of vulnerability. We can no longer afford to hid behind meetings to deflect any failure or shame that comes from our decisions. It is clear that to use these principles means to become exposed for critique—modern meetings are not for the thin skinned.

INTEGRATION

Slowly integrating these principles in the committee meetings I am in charge of. So there is always an agenda and always an action plan. I have not been able to fully get away using a meeting to make a decision, but am getting better and find that when I break this habit people have more energy after the meeting. At the conclusion of the book I could not help but go back and count how many meetings Jesus held. Zero.

“PITTAMPALLI’S VIEW OF MEETINGS IS THAT IN ORDER FOR MEETINGS TO HAPPEN THERE MUST BE A DECISION THAT IS ALREADY MADE AND MEETINGS ARE THERE TO SUPPORT THE DECISION.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A sample agenda for a modern meeting can be found at MODERNMEETINGSTANDARD.COM

“POKE THE BOX”
by Seth Godin

“DO THE WORK”
by Steven Pressfield

There are “meeting timer” apps for your smart phone or tablet. While comical in one sense it also can be a semi-serious tool to consider for self evaluation.