

Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World by Darrell W. Johnson

A book review by Dan Steinhart

“Jesus is brilliant.” That’s the very first sentence in this short 113-page book by Darrell W. Johnson (Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Regent College). Johnson is a teacher, and that means he’s a very good communicator! He’s also smart, and very human (down to earth).

The ‘fifty-seven words’ he’s referring to make up the Lord’s Prayer. Now, I have to confess, growing up, we didn’t make much of the Lord’s prayer. Even in Bible School, it was considered a part of the Bible that had been co-opted by the Catholics. I had memorized it as a child, along with John 3:16 and Romans 3:23, but no one ever tried to make the Lord’s prayer relevant to life. So, I mostly ignored it for my first 35 years. Dr. Johnson helped to change that!

In this book, Professor Johnson literally takes every single word from the prayer, explains what it meant when Jesus said it, and shows how that impacts our ability to trust God for big and small things... all the things that fall into the category of “Your will be done.”

Just flipping through the pages of the book I’m surprised at all the highlighting and underlining I’ve done! I smiled just now as I read through the section “your kingdom come”... In light of our just completed series on “A King Came Down...” this quote stood out to me -

“The presence of the kingdom cannot be separated from the presence of the King. When the King is present, so is the kingdom. Indeed, the kingdom is present only where Jesus Christ is King.” (P.49)

The words of this prayer come alive under Johnson's examination. Consider this from his discussion of "forgive us our debts..." -

The way I understand what Jesus is teaching us is this: if I am not willing to forgive others then I am not asking God to forgive me, no matter what words I use. I am asking God to excuse me, but not asking God to forgive me." (P. 87)

If you've been saying the Lord's Prayer most of your life, you probably say the words without really thinking about them. And if you seldom say the Lord's Prayer, it's probably because you see little relevance between it and your actual life. Both reasons are equally uninformed!

Once you understand the power of these words; once you grasp the character of the man who said them, and the God to whom they were addressed; and once you see that all your wants and needs are caught up in the words Jesus prays, well, you'll be anxious to pray this prayer. You'll be glad when the opportunity comes up to pray this prayer in the company of other Kingdom citizens.

You can find this book on Amazon for \$12. That's two coffees at... wherever you get coffee! Jesus said "when you pray, say this...", perhaps it would be worth the \$12 to learn the wisdom of what Jesus prayed. It's a game-changer!