



Book Reviews:

Think Orange by Reggie Joiner: A Review Article

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Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 261pp. \$21.99.

A LANDMARK BOOK ON FAMILY MINISTRY

Around the time Reggie Joiner was drafting copies of his second book (his first was a co-authored effort entitled, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*), a noticeable trend was taking shape in evangelical churches. Prior to the late 20th and early 21st century, “Family Ministry” as a distinguishable component of ecclesiastical life was not a topic of conversation among many church leaders and thinkers. To be sure, ministry to families had always been important to churches that identify themselves within the evangelical tradition, but the question of how the church and family should relate, interact, and work together for the sake of children and students has until only recently received sustained reflection.

Out of the many contributions to the discussion of family ministry, however, Joiner’s book resides as landmark. It’s popularity among church leaders and families cannot be overlooked, nor can the many conferences, books, and church-sponsored seminars that have found derivative inspiration and success as a result of *Think Orange*’s unique emphasis family ministry.

And there is good reason for the popularity. The book’s main point is as unmistakable as it is simple, and Joiner’s clever use of a secondary color to demonstrate that ministry to the next generation is neither exclusively yellow (the responsibility of the church only) nor red (carried out by the family only) but orange (both church and family working together) is a helpful way to remember what the book is all about. Joiner, also the founder of the reThink Group—a non-profit organization dedicated to helping churches develop innovative ministry to families—is a creative thinker who knows how to package his ideas in a way that is both accessible and memorable.

BRINGING CHURCH AND FAMILY TOGETHER

So what is Joiner’s main argument in the book? He states it clearly from the start: “In principle, this book is about two entities partnering to make a greater impact or to create a better solution. In practice, it explores the

possibilities of what can happen if the church and the home combine efforts for the sake of impacting the next generation” (24). In short: If churches and families are going to truly influence this next generation, they need to synchronize their efforts.

The call to cooperation between church and family, however, does not imply that both should start doing or accomplishing *more*. “In many cases,” Joiner contends, “the church and the home are each trying to do the best job they can for their children. Churches are full of programs that inspire families, and countless families participate regularly in their local churches” (26). Indeed, Joiner exhorts church leaders to relinquish some programs for the sake of the greater mission “to shine a light and demonstrate God’s love and grace to those who need it” (36).

Joiner, therefore, sets out to offer leaders and parents a vision of what is possible when church and family join forces, along with intensely practical suggestions for how both might begin to work together to instill genuine, “everyday” faith in the next generation. The first half of the book provides Joiner’s general vision as he unpacks the foundational ideas for “Thinking Orange,” while the latter half gives the five essentials for pursuing this kind of ministry. In order to cultivate an orange culture in the local church, leaders must Integrate Strategy (Chapter 6), Refine the Message (Chapter 7), Reactivate the Family (Chapter 8), Elevate Community (Chapter 9), and Leverage Influence (Chapter 10).

Throughout *Think Orange*, Joiner offers many useful ideas for helping parents impart and nurture everyday faith in their children. To list only a few, parents are encouraged to think long term (54-55), focus on cultivating their child’s heart (57-61), create a rhythm in the home where regular spiritual conversations are occurring (66-67), and expose their children to other godly adults who will reinforce what they are learning at home (70-74).

Joiner combines these practical ideas with several apt exhortations to church leaders, like the warning not to overvalue church programs (36) and the call to make sure one’s ministry to families is marked by intentionality and purpose (83). Joiner encourages pastors to avoid developing a family ministry framework in which the

various departments (children, students, parents) function independently of each other, thus “dilut[ing] the family” (124). He also reminds ministers to think creatively and carefully over how they express the substance of their teaching—to view their calling as craftsmen who labor over their words in order to communicate most effectively (135ff). I found this last bit of counsel especially helpful and motivating

JOINER’S DISCLAIMER

Despite these practical aids and timely exhortations, however, there are some significant areas of weakness that, in my judgment, tend to undermine Joiner’s efforts to build a comprehensive framework for family ministry. Granted, it may not be Joiner’s desire to raise such a structure, as he notes in the introduction: “This [book] is not intended to be infallible or inerrant. I just hope to continue a conversation that I believe is worth thoughtful dialogue” (16). Joiner then proceeds to explain that his book is not “the answer,” “always right,” “theologically profound,” “deep,” or “the final thoughts on any issue” (16). Indeed, Joiner admits that his effort may at times seem “oversimplified, overstated, shallow, idealistic, sarcastic” (16). So, what I have to say by way of critique might be taken by some as clearly missing the point. Yet, while I appreciate Joiner’s humility in acknowledging that his work is not equivalent to divine revelation, nor the last word on the topic, I find this disclaimer rather unfortunate, for it seems immediately to preclude the thoughtful dialogue he hopes to stimulate. Nevertheless, I offer these critiques in a spirit of mutuality that seeks to continue the conversation over these important issues.

A DISTASTE FOR NUANCE

One of the main weaknesses I observe in the book is Joiner’s underlying distaste for theological and biblical nuance, even as it would be appropriate in a popular book on family ministry. On pages 83-84, for example, he comments,

There are a number of things we could argue—predestination, modes of baptism, symbolism in Revelation—but we’re not going to figure

out who's right about those things until we get to heaven. We keep arguing about the things we can't know for sure, even though most of us really do believe that a hundred years from now the only thing that will matter is someone's relationship with God. And we can know something about that.

There are two things I find unhelpful in this paragraph. First, by placing the matter of predestination alongside of symbolism in Revelation, for example, Joiner makes it appear that these two issues reside on the same plane of significance. Although a controversial subject among some Christians, I suspect that many family ministers in Reformed circles would contend that the issue of predestination is far more important than symbolism in Revelation, and one that has profound bearing on how a child understands his "relationship with God," especially as he or she grows and is able to handle weightier biblical truths. Second, by placing "mode of baptism" in his list of theological uncertainties, Joiner makes light of important denominational distinctions. This would not be much of a problem except that convictions related to the mode of baptism have held sway in Baptist and Presbyterian churches because each denomination considers their form of ecclesiology a matter of *obedience to Jesus*.¹ In speaking the way he does in the above paragraph, Joiner actually undermines an essential aspect to one's relationship to God; namely, that one should be always willing to obey what he believes the Scripture teach.

Joiner tries to surmount the impasse created by doctrinal differences by simply going around it. "To combat all this, I go by a simplistic doctrinal statement. I know it lacks a lot of detail, but I have this one memorized: Jesus is who he says he was. What the Bible says is true is true. Everybody is going somewhere forever" (84). Yet, this doctrinal statement raises several questions that a Christian with only a cursory level of training would likely pose. Who did Jesus say he is? What does the Bible say is true? Didn't you just imply that there are debates about what the Bible actually says?

NOT ENOUGH 'ESSENTIAL' TRUTHS

These statements would be less of a bother and taken more as rhetorically motivated understatement if Joiner at some point carefully described the basic elements of the gospel and how a child comes into a relationship with God. When it comes to explaining these things, however, the reader will find no reference to sin, confession, guilt, or repentance, and where the cross of Christ is mentioned, it is used in generic references to the love Jesus demonstrated there (49), in a passing allusion to John 3:14 (31), or as one of Jesus' "object lessons" (153).² I don't doubt for a moment that Joiner believes confessing one's sin and having some understanding of what Christ achieved on the cross are essential to salvation, but to my mind his lack of clarity here does not serve his primary purpose of helping parents further their child's relationship with God if that relationship has anything to do with believing the gospel.³

A TENDENCY TOWARD AMBIGUITY

Joiner is also vague about other important issues as well. His tendency toward ambiguity occurs throughout the book with undefined references to "our message" (143) or "the story" (208), or admonishments to focus on "what really matters" or to not create "unrealistic expectations" for parents (168). I am happy to agree with Joiner on all these points except that we are never really told in any significant detail what "the story" is, or "what really matters" (except for generic references to a child's relationship with God), or what it means to place "unrealistic expectations" on parents. But these are small concerns. A more serious example of Joiner's ambiguity appears in his discussion of how the church is to fulfill her purpose.

In order for the church to retain its luster as a city on a hill, Joiner contends that she must be careful not to "drift from what she was originally designed to do" (32). The church tends to drift when her lampstand is used to further personal agendas or to "justify our opinions or win debates" (32) or to "make political statements" (33). Although I agree with him in principle, I find it unhelpful that Joiner never really indicates explicitly what debates or political statements he has in mind. He does, however, tell of times when he and his church staff have

been asked by other Christians where they stood on issues that fell within the “4-H Club: Hollywood, Homosexuality, Halloween, or Harry Potter.” On such occasions he and the staff would remind each other “Don’t move the lampstand” (33)! Does this mean, then, that church leaders should not provide guidance from Scripture concerning these matters? Should the church not take a stance on an important issue—and one that Scripture clearly addresses—like human sexuality?

A similar admonishment appears a little later in the book when Joiner wonders aloud: “Have you ever considered the possibility that how families treat each other may have far greater consequences on children than where we draw the line on issues of sex education, gay marriage, or stem cell research” (53)? He answers: “It’s one thing to stand up for what you believe, but it’s easy to lose sight of issues that genuinely affect the family” (53). It’s difficult, however, to see how the church’s stance on such issues won’t directly affect the family, especially in the long run. While a charitable reading of Joiner at this point would take him to mean that we should not turn the church into a corporate means to exert political influence, his lack of clarity leaves the reader wondering whether the church should speak concerning these important matters at all. In my judgment, Joiner would have been better served to leave these topics alone and maintain his focus on the nature of family ministry rather than alighting on these complex issues only long enough to give quick, pithy opinions.⁴

DOWNPLAYING THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE AND KNOWLEDGE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Despite these instances of ambiguity, I believe that Joiner’s hesitancy to add some doctrinal detail to his book has to do with his desire to keep things simple and to distinguish his vision of ministry from those characterized by a brand of stale orthodoxy. I sympathize with these aims. But I am afraid he is in danger of swinging the pendulum too far in the other direction. On page 188, for example, Joiner observes, “The reality is when it comes to programming, many churches act as if *truth* was the most important aspect of discipleship. Teaching and content become the most important things that

happen in every environment. We begin to think that discipleship is a class or a curriculum. What if discipleship is as much about serving in ministry as it is about Bible study?” Joiner wants to see other components to discipleship valued alongside of teaching and content: “life changing truth, spiritual disciplines, personal ministry, significant relationships, and pivotal circumstances.” All of these facets of discipleship are indispensable for genuine spiritual growth.

Joiner’s underlying concern here is certainly valid: To the degree we think that our ministry is *only* the dissemination of truth, to that degree have we become imbalanced and, ironically, unbiblical. There must be more to our labor as pastors and teachers than the mere download of biblical information, and Joiner is right to draw our attention to these other important components of discipleship. But it must also be kept in mind that truth is central to discipleship because it is essential to sanctification (John 17:17), and that the teaching ministry of the church is her *primary ministry*.⁵ Because biblical truth must shape and inform the other areas of discipleship, teaching will remain central to our work among students and families. Indeed, a disciple, by definition, is one who is consistently learning and gleaned knowledge from a teacher.

Joiner’s concern that we avoid a “classroom” approach to discipleship again appears a little later in the book as he discusses the role of service in cultivating spiritual growth. “So what do you think would be more exciting,” Joiner asks, “going to classes that teach you about mountain climbing, or actually standing at the summit after a hard climb to get a firsthand look at the view” (205)? Obvious answer: mountain climbing. Joiner ties this illustration to how churches plan their programming. “Most churches spend a lot of energy trying to get students to come to programs where they talk about growing as a Christian, but they forget that the way you grow is by experience.” He continues, “It’s important to understand how closely spiritual formation is connected to the act of serving. . . . Too many churches teach as if students should sit and listen instead of actually experiencing hands-on ministry” (206). Having seen the passion kindled in students as a result of their participation in foreign or domestic mission trips, for

example, Joiner is discouraged when he sees these same students lose their passion after a few weeks back home. What happened? “I have a theory. Maybe it’s because when we return home from that exciting mission, we put them right back in a classroom. For a while, they had opportunity to experience what God designed them to be” (209). Joiner and his staff at North Point church eventually eliminated programming that included classroom Bible study so that students could serve on Sunday mornings (210). Joiner even entertains the idea that involvement in ministry may serve as a catalyst for “initiating faith in someone’s heart” (211).

There is an emphasis here that I happily welcome. Young believers, just like older believers, need to be led in discovering and using profitably their spiritual gifts. Joiner is right: Discipleship should involve more than just the intellectual element—a life of fruitful ministry is the will of God for all his people (John 15:8). And the reminder that young people should be entrusted with more responsibility rather than greater amounts of unencumbered freedom is a refreshing note sounded in the midst of a parenting culture prone to indulge junior high and high school students. So my quibble is not here in Joiner’s effort to motivate leaders and parents to help their kids develop their ability to serve; it is in his tendency—even subtly—to downplay the role of Scripture and knowledge in the spiritual formation of young Christians.

Generally speaking, it appears that Joiner is fighting against creating an overly intellectualized approach to family ministry. His comments on the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:2-7 imply this concern.

This passage suggests that it really doesn’t matter what a church is right about if it is wrong about its relationship with God. *God is more interested in the heart of the church than He is with its size or intellect.* He is less impressed by our ability to debate church structure or theology than He is with our willingness to touch those living around us. We are called to love him and demonstrate his love to the world around us” (36, emphasis original).

Later in the book, Joiner negatively characterizes the Pharisees as those who, “loved to flex their spiritual muscles and theological intellect” (120). In several places—some of which we have already mentioned—Joiner appears to dismiss theological debate as a waste of energy (e.g. 38, 53, 136, 140, 146). So, while he is correct to highlight the danger of a church becoming interested in doctrine at the expense of love for Christ and others, I am afraid that these kinds of comments, coupled with Joiner’s general dislike for theological distinctions, give the impression that sound doctrine and good theology are not really that important to family ministry, at least not beyond the mere basics. Over time, I believe this kind of approach to discipleship will have a detrimental effect on ministry to families, for it will eventually detach ministry activity from the nutrient of biblical truth and the gospel.⁶

OVERPLAYING THE ROLE OF SERVICE AS AN GAUGE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Beyond this, a related problem I see in Joiner’s conception of how service and ministry relate to spiritual growth is his neglect to consider what constitutes genuine spirituality. Many of us are tempted to place too much importance on external religious activity as a sign of vital relationship with Christ. The reason for this is that service and activity in ministry are easy to see and tally. If the evidence of a person’s conversion can be found in his participation in ministry and acts of service, then the more activity, the better! If students are ambivalent or indifferent toward spiritual things, then don’t expose them to more teaching; get them serving! The problem, however, is that genuine conversion and spiritual growth are discerned according to different principles and far more *difficult* to cultivate. Joiner, on the other hand, sees activity in ministry as one of the primary, if not *the* primary marks of corporate spiritual health in youth groups. “Senior leaders, parents, and student pastors have to be intentional about changing their priorities. They should *rethink* the pressure that is put on the average student ministry to divine success by the amount of programming or attendance. Instead of asking, “How many came last week?” they should ask, “What per-

centage of students are engaging in ministry” (214)?

To counter the attendance question with the service question is definitely a step in the right direction for many youth ministries. But it must also be noted that growth in genuine spirituality is often gradual, and, by and large, works from the inside out. It is for these two reasons that the predominant analogy in the New Testament to illustrate spiritual growth is agricultural, where root gives rise to fruit, not the other way around.⁷ Service and ministry have a role to play, but, I contend, not to the degree that Joiner advocates. Heartfelt worship, a sincere desire to obey Jesus in difficult situations, the growing ability to kill sin without legalism, genuine humility, an increasing concern over one’s sin, the willingness to acknowledge Christ in the midst of unbelieving friends at school, a hunger for God’s word privately and publically, a sacrificial love for other Christians, and a consistent honoring of one’s parents are the traits for which we should look and seek to nurture in our students as signs of genuine spirituality.⁸ Mere activity in ministry cannot guarantee, necessarily promote, or serve as a substitute of these “marks of the Spirit.” I have seen students—some under my own care when I was a youth pastor—who were active at church and in positions of leadership and influence, who found purpose in showing concern for the poor and disadvantaged, yet who were incredibly worldly, indifferent toward Scripture, ashamed of Christ at school, and consistently disrespectful to their parents and siblings. Activity in Christian ministry and service did not stimulate their spiritual growth; it may have even hindered it. Indeed, it is entirely possible to be active in exciting ministry, yet not know Jesus (see Matt 7:21-23).⁹

FINAL COMMENTS: APPRECIATION AND CONCERN

Overall, I appreciate Joiner’s call to view discipleship as more than just mere teaching. He wants leaders and parents to take a “holistic view of discipleship” (212) that cultivates the whole person, not just their intellect. A broader, more comprehensive picture of adult-to-student discipleship must involve other components as well: training in the spiritual disciplines, the development of a personal ministry, and helping students view pivotal

life circumstances as a way in which God stretches and changes them (see p. 188). Joiner’s focus here, I believe, serves as a helpful corrective to those of us who are wired to think exclusively in cognitive categories. So my concern is not with his desire to draw attention to what may be some overlooked components of healthy discipleship, but with his neglect to wrestle *theologically* with some of the deeper, more foundational issues related to the discipleship of children and students.

Specifically, more attention needs to be given to what constitutes a genuine conversion in a young person, and how the Scriptures inform and guide our understanding of discipleship and authentic spirituality. It is the neglect to carefully ponder these two areas that Joiner’s discussion of the relationship between service and spiritual growth falls short. There is another interpretation one can offer for why the students Joiner described came home from their mission trip and lost their “passion” (209). It could be that they were stirred up with religious excitement and philanthropic zeal, but the roots of their hearts had not grown deep into the soil of the gospel and the truth of God’s word. Because their passion did not originate from within as it was kindled by the word and the Holy Spirit, once the external motivation and excitement of the mission trip was removed, these young folks lost their enthusiasm. So, we should ask: Are we equipping parents and leaders so that they will know how to distinguish these motivations? Could a young person be active in church activity but not really growing in vital spirituality? How can we tell if a young person is led by the Spirit or merely religious? These are tough but crucially important questions, not only for churches that have an obvious bent toward teaching, but for any church that cares for the spiritual health and wellbeing of its children and students.

Again, I anticipate the objection that these critiques are unfair inasmuch as I am treating Joiner’s book as something it is not—that I am placing standards upon it that belong to a book of theology. While I’m not convinced I have evaluated Joiner’s work by an unreasonable set of criteria, I do believe his tendency to doctrinal ambiguity arises not only from a desire to keep things simple, but also from his intention to reach out broadly to Christian church leaders and parents. He says as much

in the latter pages of the book: “Regardless of the size, denomination, doctrine, or structure of your church, you have incredible potential to partner with the family for the sake of a generation” (228). Joiner’s message is clear and can be applied across denominational lines: churches and families need to work together to have the greatest impact on the next generation. Point gladly taken. But without some theological and biblical contours, Joiner’s message runs the risk of becoming something less than distinctively Christian. And when that happens, leaders and parents will have very little to offer the next generation, no matter how well they say it.

ENDNOTES

¹ Knighten makes this excellent point in his review of Think Orange found here: <http://thomasknigten.com/?p=35>.

² There is one other time that Joiner mentions the cross. On page 83, he comments, “If we really believe that nothing is more important than someone’s relationship with God, it makes sense to combine the influences of the home and church. This is what motivated Moses to rally the Hebrew nation around the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6. It’s why Jesus stepped on the planet and went to the cross.” The “this” to which the second sentence refers is “someone’s relationship with God.” So, here Joiner is simply stating that one of the reasons Jesus went to the cross was because there is “nothing more important than someone’s relationship with God.” As with the above references, however, there is no discussion as to what occurred at the cross more than that Jesus died there.

³ In a chart on page 154, Joiner provides a “Progression of Basic Truths” as a child transitions from preschool to student ministry. At *preschool* age, a child will learn that, “God made me, God loves me, [and] Jesus wants to be my friend forever.” In *children’s ministry*, they will learn, “I need to make a wise choice, I can trust God no matter what, [and] I should treat others the way I want to be treated. In *student ministry*, they will learn, “I am created to pursue an authentic relationship with my Creator, I belong to Jesus Christ and define who I am by what he says, [and] I exist everyday to demonstrate God’s love to a broken world” (see

also page 244). Although I trust these ‘basic truths’ are meant to serve as broad categories under which teachers will form and plan their lessons, we must say that there are more vital truths we must teach our kids than what is implied in this chart. Even with two references to Jesus, this collection of truths seems basically moralistic more than distinctively Christian.

⁴ Joiner is also ambiguous about truth as it relates to one’s pursuit of God. For example, on page 146, he comments, “Isn’t it interesting that God doesn’t give us a lot of detail about Himself? You say, ‘What about the Bible?’ I know there’s a lot in the Bible, but have you ever stopped to think about what’s not in the Bible? I believe God told us the most important stuff, but there is still an element of mystery. Maybe God is more interested in our pursuit of Him than anything else. He doesn’t want us to package Him so neatly or define Him too narrowly. If we could explain everything there is about God, he wouldn’t be God.” Without some clarification, it is difficult to know exactly what Joiner is talking about here. What does it mean to “package God too narrowly?” Is he referring here to particular doctrines? When he says that God is “more interested in our pursuit of him than anything else” does that mean we should not strive know true things about God—even theologically nuanced things—because this is “packaging God too narrowly?” Should we have a conviction about whether, for example, God knows the future, or is this something that should be left in the category of mystery? I bring up the issue of God’s knowledge of the future not because Joiner alludes to it anywhere, but because it is an important theological issue currently debated among evangelicals and because it has direct bearing on how we teach our children about the nature of God. Although the debate itself is very complex, the main issue is rather simple to communicate to a child or high school student: either God knows the future or he doesn’t. Defining God narrowly, then, *does* matter in this case, even for children and teenagers. Whatever Joiner intends to convey in this passage, his language is far too ambiguous to be of much help.

⁵ The pastoral epistles strongly emphasize this last point as does great commission in Matt 28:18-20.

⁶ Throughout Scripture, genuine spiritual growth is connected chiefly to the word of God (Ps 1:1-2). It is when we abide in Christ's word that we bear much fruit (John 15:7). The collective growth of the church depends upon the ministry of the pastors and teachers and the congregants speaking truth to one another (Eph 4:11-15). Individual growth is closely tied to knowledge (Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:10; 3:10; 2 Pet 3:18) and to the word dwelling richly in us (Col 3:17).

⁷ In my judgment, Joiner makes two mistakes here in his discussion of spiritual growth and service. First, he reverses the order of significance. Ministry is vital to spiritual growth like an apple is vital to an apple tree. The tree's health and growth do not depend upon or flow from the apple, yet the only way to know if the tree is healthy is if we see good fruit (Matt 7:17). But this observation highlights a second problem: the good fruits to which we should look as signs of spiritual health are not necessarily formal ministry like participation on mission trips, but love for and obedience to the revealed will of God.

⁸ See Eph 5:19-21; John 15:10-12; Col 3:1-11; Is 66:2; Rom 7:14-25; Matt 6:1-3; Luke 9:26; Matt 4:4; 1 John 4:11-18; Eph 6:1-2.

⁹ Joiner relays a story of dad whose young daughter was involved in an unhealthy lifestyle and relationship. Try as he might, this dad could not get his daughter to renounce the relationship and remove herself from the kind of life she was living. Finally, someone told him that he needed to present his daughter with a better story than the one she was pursuing: she had come to associate her dad and church with a boring, unadventurous story; the life she was living was thrilling and fun. So what did this dad do? He suggested to his family that they raise \$20000 to build an orphanage in Mexico. Almost immediately his family was engaged with the project and his wayward daughter even offered her technological expertise to raise awareness on her MySpace page. "Within three weeks, the girl had broken up with her boyfriend. Why? Because she found a better story, one in which she gets to play the heroine. She gets to sacrifice and give of herself to accomplish something that's great, and she wanted and needed that story" (208). While I am grateful for

the turnaround in this girl's life, we must notice a few things about this account. First, there is nothing distinctively Christian about it. The girl may have left her relationship and turned things around socially, but this does not mean she came into a saving relationship with Jesus. I know plenty of stories of unbelievers who offer similar accounts of how philanthropic experiences helped change their life, promote healing, and draw them out of destructive lifestyles. What makes this girl's experience any different than these unbelievers except that it occurred within the context of the church? Secondly, the girl is still the center of the story. During the time this young woman was with her boyfriend, she refused her dad's demands and pleas because she valued her desires over obedience to her dad and, ultimately, to the Lord. In other words, she saw herself as the center of the universe. By getting her excited in a mission opportunity in which she saw herself as the heroine—as a benefactor helping the less fortunate—this focus on self was merely transferred from one context to another. This disconnect occurred because the story to which she was introduced was mainly about doing good things and her feeling good about doing them, rather than the narrative of redemption where Jesus is the hero who rescues us from condemnation. In my judgment, a stronger grasp on the gospel and on what constitutes a genuine conversion would bring much clarity to Joiner's discussion of the role of serving in one's spiritual growth.