

Practicing the King's Economy

By M. Rhodes and R. Holt (with B. Fikkert)
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REVIEWED BY MARTY MCMAHONE
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

What is God's plan for living a life that results in human flourishing? How does the church live out that plan while living in a broken world? Those questions lie at the heart of the problem that the authors of *Practicing the King's Economy* are trying to solve. Using the picture of the church as an outpost of the Kingdom of God located in earthly territory, the authors encourage us to demonstrate a different kind of economy from the one practiced by the world.

The primary theme of the book revolves around advancing the Kingdom of God in everyday economic life. The authors see the church as intended to demonstrate what it looks like to live by God's standards. While other writers have argued that the Church has a responsibility to reveal what the Kingdom of God looks like to the world, most have not focused on daily economic life as this book does. The authors take an interesting approach to explaining what God's economy would look like. They discuss six "keys" to the kingdom approach. These keys are biblical themes that open the way to following God's plan for our economic life. For each of the keys (worship, community, work, equity, creation, and rest), the authors dedicate two chapters. The first chapter discusses the biblical foundation for understanding the right way to approach the key. The biblical understanding is usually based on Old Testament examples of how God expected his people to live. The second chapter in the pair gives illustrations of people who are practicing the key in their daily lives. This approach gives a nice balance of the theological concept and the practical application of the concept. It also offers some good example stories to show students how people are living out their faith in business.

The first two keys revolve around areas typically seen as intimately connected with church life. The first key, worship, asks the question "Are we going to serve God or mammon?" The authors suggest that idolatry is primarily an economic activity. The real question is where we

are going to place our trust for provision. The authors emphasize giving as a way to learn not to trust primarily in money, but their emphasis is on giving to God's work rather than just giving to the church. That might involve helping the poor find better ways to live. They contend that giving to the poor should be done in a way to bridge the gaps between rich and poor and to provide opportunity rather than dependence. The second key is community, and with this key the authors focus almost exclusively on the Lord's Supper, or, as they call it, "God's Potluck Feast." Relying heavily on the Old Testament feasts, they argue that bringing the poor into the community has to involve feasting together. Rather than giving food to the poor, the Church should gather people to share a table feast. This communion offers the needy the opportunity to share with dignity. The authors may have overstated their case in connecting the communion event so thoroughly with feeding the poor, but it does seem clear the New Testament church did share food together. This idea of bringing people together to share rather than setting up separate places to feed the poor, and isolate them, is a powerful one.

The last four keys involve how we relate to the world around us. The third key, and probably the book's most frustrating chapter, is the work key. The authors present some valuable themes around the idea of work: 1) Work allows us to fulfill our God-given vocation of creatively unpacking creation's potential. 2) Work is the normal, appropriate means by which people ought to provide for themselves. 3) Injustice often corrupts work by oppressing workers. 4) God's people are to intentionally create opportunities for work for the marginalized. The problem in the work key chapters, though, is that the authors' passion for the marginalized led them to focus almost exclusively on the fourth point and ignore how good work provides the way to impact creation, create value for others, and, ultimately, benefit society and the

marginalized. For the fourth key, equity, the authors present a people of God concerned with making certain that no one within the family goes wanting. They suggest the New Testament church became a family who worked together and pooled resources together to make certain that all could find opportunities to get what they need. In the practical chapter for this key, the authors note the role that business might have in helping the poor to provide for themselves by improving access to jobs, investments, and education. In many ways, that chapter seemed like the chapter the work chapter should have been. The fifth key is the responsibility given to all believers to care for God's creation as stewards. The concept of stewardship implies doing what is best for the owner, in this case God. The righteous person lives out a "significant attempt to work in such a way that our economic lives *bless the land and all that depend on it*" (Rhodes, Holt, & Fikkert, 2018, p. 209, emphasis in original). The sixth and final key to God's economy is the Lord's gift of the Sabbath. The authors note that the Sabbath commandment ties together our duty to God and man. Not only do we need to take a day off, but we need to make sure those who work for us do as well. Practicing the Sabbath means giving up control and embracing our limits.

The book focuses more on personal practices with financial implications than with specific business practices. Therefore, it is not likely to be effective text for a business classroom. It would work better as a secondary text giving students a chance to think about how they want to relate to the assets they acquire over time. The call to live a life that demonstrates God's economy to the world rather than be seduced by the false god of materialism is powerful in the book. It also could work well for pastors and others who are not trained in business areas to help them think about the church's role in economic issues beyond the simplistic elements of giving to the church. Possibly it's best use, however, is as a sourcebook for illustrations and case studies. Sometimes it feels as if the same stories about Kingdom living in the American economy get retold over and over again. The myriad original examples of how people are putting the key ideas into practice make this a good source book for illustrating biblical themes as they connect to work, business, and life in general.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Marty McMahon, PhD, is the McBryde Professor in the McLane College of Business at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas. His primary role at UMHB is teaching leadership at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. His research interests are in the intersection of Christian faith and ordinary life and the practice of servant leadership.