BOOKS I HAVE READ: NO SHORTCUT TO SUCCESS

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Category: Observations

It is both sad and revealing that Matt Rhodes felt that he needed to write No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions. The message of the book is that in places, the modern missions movement has adopted a number of "silver bullet" approaches which promise amazing results, while demanding very little in terms of sacrifice or engagement from missionaries.

The book is just over 200 pages long and is written at a slightly academic level. There are extensive notes and a good index. It will set you back around Â£15 for the paperback and a little less than that for the Kindle version.

I need to admit that I have little awareness or understanding of the phenomena that Rhodes is criticising. American, ultra-pragmatic missiology is not something that I study in any great detail. However, there are enough quotes from the architects of of these approaches to give the author's critique a solid foundation.

> *Iâ€™m a missionary, and Iâ€™ve been one long enough to realize that fads come and go in missions too. Insider movements, business as mission, the Camel Method, CPM, DMM, T4T: Iâ€™ve seen them all roll over us. Iâ€™ve read the stories and statistics. Iâ€™ve heard the proponents of each new methodology claim that itâ€™s the solution weâ€™ve been looking for! Iâ€™ve seen these methodologies presented as the only true way back to the New Testament pattern.*

It is worth noting that prior to being a missionary, Rhodes was a population statistician, so when he criticises some of the figures reported by mission advocates, he knows what he is talking about. However, even if you are not a fan of the various approaches that the book is criticising, it is well worth reading for its stress on traditional, slow, sacrificial and committed approaches to mission. These are summed up in ten milestones:

> *Milestone #1: Raise Support and Communicate Well with Your Sending Church*
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> *Milestone #2: Pursue Pre-Field Training in the Scriptures*
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> *Milestone #3: Donâ€™t Forget Pre-Field Training That Covers Practical Skills*
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> *Milestone #4: Insist on Several Years of Full-Time Language and Culture Acquisition upon Arriving on the Field*

> *Milestone #5: Develop a Deep Understanding of Your Target Peopleâ€™s Worldview*
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> *Milestone #6: Communicate the Gospel Widely and Boldly in Culturally Understandable Ways*
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> *Milestone #7: Baptize New Believers and Bring Them Together into a Church*
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> *Milestone #8: Disciple New Believers until Their Christian Worldview Has Subverted Other Ways of Looking at the World*
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> *Milestone #9: Appoint Leaders from within Churches Once Both Local Churches and Local Believers Have Reached Maturity*
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> *Milestone #10: Where the Scriptures Are Not Available, Translate the Scriptures and Promote Literacy So That New Believers Are Able to Read*

Although written in a US context, I believe this book is relevant in the UK, too.

A few quotes:

> *For now, I simply want to suggest that missionaries, like math teachers, have a set of very human skills they need to learn. The most difficult of these skills have to do with communication, since most missionaries work in foreign cultures and languages. While basic linguistic and cultural competency can be achieved within a year or two, it takes considerably longer to reach the fluency we need to navigate or even partake in spiritual conversations marked by high emotions, nuanced concepts, and fast, colloquial speech.*

> *Iâ€™ve lived in three North African cities. Surprisingly, in every city, the vast majority of long-term missionaries had little theological understanding of either Christianity or Islam, the areaâ€™s predominant religion. Most missionaries also had a poor grasp of the local languages and cultures. None of this disturbed them as they went about trying to share the gospel... They operated on the assumption that if they â€œlived out the gospelâ€ and prayed hard enough for a â€œbreakthrough,â€ their ministries would bear fruit. Again, this approach is colored with a kind of gnosticism or hyper-spiritualism that overlooks Godâ€™s pattern of working through ordinary, human means.*

> *Lastly, while Iâ€™m deeply concerned about the lack of professionalism I see in the missionary community, I donâ€™t assume thereâ€™s any laziness or sinful agenda behind it. It is driven by misunderstanding, not malice.*

> *â€œFar too many of our books, articles, trainings, and conversations seem to operate at the level of â€˜what worksâ€™ rather than â€˜what is most faithful to Scripture.â€™â€*

> *Ultimately, â€œsuccessâ€ in ministry isnâ€™t a matter of numbers but of ministering in a way that honors the Lord.*

> *Remember: weâ€™ve been sent out as ambassadors. In the secular world, ambassadors are usually highly intelligent people. Their preparation includes developing a detailed knowledge of their own nationâ€™s interests, the interests of the nations to which they are sent, and howâ€"in a language and culture not native to themâ€"they can communicate their nationâ€™s message in the most persuasive and winsome way possible.*

> *Muslim views of salvation are somewhat complicated. In many forms of Islam, entry into paradise depends on our works to an extent, but God ultimately shows mercy to whomever he pleases. So Muslims struggle to perceive any conflict between salvation by works or by grace. Most missionaries donâ€™t know how to lay the necessary groundwork to help their friends understand how starkly the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace differs from Muslim teaching.*