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BOOK REVIEW

Ken Shigematsu. *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 256 pp. Pbk. ISBN 0310499267.

God in My Everything focuses on creating a “rule of life,” partly as an intentional means to managing the many things that make our lives busy, but more importantly, as a way to invite God into the midst of our busy lifestyles: “The goal of having a rule is not to achieve a ‘balanced life’ per se, but to live with Christ at the center of all we do” (27). Drawing inspiration from Christian monks and nuns—and even the old Japanese Bushido samurai—who from centuries past lived according to a rule or code of life, Shigematsu examines their example and appropriates their wisdom and proven practices for the busy person today living in the thick of today’s complex world.

Shigematsu argues against popular misconceptions about the monastic life, that monks, and the Celtic monastics in particular, held that in order to live a holier life with God one must withdraw from the world and retreat into a life of quietude and solemn prayer, strict order, and austerity. Shigematsu says that, in fact, in their day, monasteries were known to be set up more visibly within busier urban districts so that there would be more opportunity to offer hospitality and service to people. He states, “The Celtic monasteries were not just places of prayer and worship; they served as hotels, emergency shelters, hospitals, libraries, universities, centers for the arts, and mission-sending bases. These spiritual pilgrims were not just concerned with their own spiritual growth; they were a force for justice and community transformation” (16). Further, there are proven rules to live by that the monastics of old have to offer the busy person today that are not meant to make us more “religious” but to help

produce a life-giving rhythm of practices in our lives in the midst of our busyness. This in turn produces a life more attuned to God that grows deeper in relationship with God and is itself a prayer to God.

As a helpful illustration, Shigematsu uses the image of a trellis supporting the growth of plants as a way of organizing the main components of a healthy rule of life. At the bottom of the trellis, the section closest to the soil, are the three rudiments or “root” practices: (1) *Sabbath-keeping*, (2) *Prayer*, and (3) *Sacred Reading*. From these three foundational practices, three more categories are met as one moves up the trellis: (1) *Relate*, (2) *Restore*, and (3) *Reach Out*. Each of these three categories has three components within it: (1) *Relate*: (a) Spiritual Friendship, (b) Sexuality, and (c) Family Life; (2) *Restore*: (a) Care for the Body, (b) Play, and (c) Money; (3) *Reach Out*: (a) Work, (b) Justice, and (c) Witness. Shigematsu unpacks each of these components from a biblical perspective and argues that a rule of life that attunes each of these areas to God is one that provides the most support for cultivating a deeper and healthier spiritual life with God.

Practicing the three root practices of Sabbath, prayer, and sacred reading regularly truly affects the health and well-being of all the other components on the trellis. I was not surprised that Shigematsu begins by discussing the importance of practicing Sabbath in our lives, as it is all too easy for us to neglect this crucial component in the endless list of tasks that always need to be done.

Shigematsu’s chapter 9, “Family Ties,” is filled with memorable real-life examples and illustrations that highlight the important ingredients that keep the family unit strong, such as parents being there for their children, practicing hospitality as a family, working and serving together, and making a deliberate effort to protect and make the most of the precious time when the family is all together. However, the realities of family life that were so thoughtfully put forth in this chapter seem to get disconnected in the next chapter entitled “Eat, Sleep, Swim.” This chapter discusses the importance of taking good care of our bodies through healthy eating, exercise, and getting enough rest.

Although it is another very useful discussion full of practical advice, I kept asking myself throughout the chapter, “But what if there are babies, children, or teenagers in the picture? How is this discussion relevant in these circumstances?” An encouraging piece of advice on this came in chapter thirteen titled, “Thank God It Is Monday.” In arguing for a more positive and Christ-centered perspective on work and how our work can draw us closer to God, Shigematsu quotes Dallas Willard who contends that, “the primary place of our spiritual formation is not in our church or small groups, or fifteen minutes of reading the Bible and praying, but our workplace or school or at home as we change light bulbs or *diapers*” (italics mine; 173).

This naturally raises the point that perhaps using the monastic tradition as a basis for spiritual development has its limitations, since the monastic life is a life without crying babies, rambunctious children, and rebellious teenagers. It is not even a life that involves married couples and the struggles that come with married life itself, let alone parenting. In this regard, the monastic lifestyle Shigematsu draws from throughout the book is essentially a life of singlehood within community and this applies only to a specific constituency in the typical church today. More space should have been devoted to this matter to bridge this gap and to speak to those of us who see this major difference between the monastic life and our own, and thus read the pages of the book with a bit more skepticism as to how realistic Shigematsu’s proposition really is.

At the same time, however, chapter 11, titled “Play like a Child,” offers a unique perspective on what play is; Shigematsu defines it as, “Doing something for its own sake.” Rediscovering what it means to play can have healthy effects on our spiritual lives. Yet something is true play only when it is not being done with a certain utilitarian result in mind. “Play is more like a meal shared with a beloved friend. It’s something we engage in for its own sake—to enjoy the company of another and to savor the food. In play there is no ulterior agenda” (143). Play, much like Sabbath-keeping, is rather counter-cultural to our busy, achievement- and performance-based society, and Shigematsu is right in making this an important part of the trellis of spiritual

well-being. Just as children can become absorbed in play, play can move adults closer to God by helping us to fix our attention on something outside of ourselves for its own sake. This helps us to cultivate a contemplative attitude that enables us to focus more on God and less on ourselves.

I was impressed by Shigematsu's decision to put the chapter on the topic of money ("Money: Master or Servant?") in part four of the book under "Restore" alongside discussion on taking care of our bodies, eating and sleeping well, and rediscovering the joy of play. On the one hand, it seemed to make more sense to fit discussion on money into the next section, "Reaching Out," that discusses work, practicing justice in our communities, and giving testimony to God's work in our lives, which perhaps provide more specific ends to which our money can go. Shigematsu does discuss such appropriate ends in the context of what he calls, "grace giving" in his chapter on money; however, his emphasis is much more on our attitudes towards money and the restorative act of allowing God to fill those places in our lives that we may have thought only money could fill. Jesus talked about money in terms of how it is so capable of exercising mastery over us, and Shigematsu is right to focus on this and put more emphasis on the condition of our hearts pertaining to money. Spiritual restoration begins to take place in our lives when we start to renounce money's mastery over us by making more room in different parts of our lives to say "no" to mammon's influence and "yes" to God. Shigematsu captures this key component well, which reflects the heart that has characterized the longstanding practice of taking vows in a monastic community.

Shigematsu says that a practice in churches today that helps in this process of cultivating healthier attitudes towards money is tithing. He affirms the church's longstanding practice of the tithe and that a good starting point for a rule of life is to give 10 percent of one's income to the church as a way to develop trust in God to provide for all of our needs. Shigematsu cites Malachi 3:10 as a scriptural basis for this practice of trusting God with our income but disappointingly provides only one paragraph to explain it. His emphasis instead is clearly on what he calls "grace

giving” rather than just a 10 percent rule of giving, since he spends the rest of the chapter filling this concept out. He describes it as a form of giving that flows out of the generosity of our hearts according to our gratitude towards God for the grace he extends to us in lovingly blessing us and providing for us.

Shigematsu is correct in stating that the New Testament emphasizes such voluntary “grace giving” over a more fixed 10 percent system that was more applicable in Old Testament times. However, what he implies is that voluntary “grace giving” begins after the 10 percent “fixed” amount has been given to the church. This may send a message that God requires a sort of down payment first before more voluntary, freely-given money can be given out of heartfelt generosity. Unfortunately, this chapter makes me wonder who this book is really targeting. Is it primarily for middle- to upper middle-class people and their income levels? If this book is meant to be for people of all income levels, including those of very low incomes, then fixing a 10 percent rule as a starting point for giving may be inappropriate.

This leads to my last point. In chapter 2, “Creating a Spiritual Ecosystem,” Shigematsu uses the analogy of sailing to show that there are things we can do in our own lives, like a sailor preparing the sails of a boat, to prepare ourselves for the wind of God’s Spirit to blow into our lives. He talks briefly at other points in the book as well about his love for sailing and being out on the ocean taking in the beauty of the coastline and sunsets. As insightful as this analogy may be, its use in the opening pages of the book may imply that this pastor is speaking to his reader from a place of privilege and comfort—sailing is expensive. Having sailing as a hobby does not communicate monastic attributes such as relinquishment of material possessions and humble status, which is contrary to the point he is trying to make in using the monastic traditions as the basis for his book.

I started to wonder if Shigematsu was going to cheapen the integrity of what the monastic tradition is all about by taking from it only what fits into his version of Christian spirituality without honoring the sacrifices and demonstrations of selfless-

ness these followers of Christ made to choose such a life for Christ. Thankfully this is not the case and the book consistently shows how the monastics of old are in a sense serving us today through their faithfulness to God. This book brings out their example well for us to live by in our day, and thus they are honored as those who have walked the Christian life before us. I commend Shigematsu for discerning what is at the core of monastic Christian spirituality and presenting it in his book as something useful and vital for the busy person today who desires to have a deeper relationship with God. Pastors and church leaders today will provide a tremendous service to their congregations by not allowing these monastic voices of past and present to be marginalized as a kind of Christianity that is “different than what we do here,” and, therefore, misperceived as irrelevant, outdated, or too religious. *God in My Everything* graciously makes a persuasive case for the value of incorporating the wisdom of the monastics into the teaching, preaching, and educational culture of every church community as a very beneficial component to the spiritual health of the person.

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