

by Donald Miller

In this wonderfully written book, Miller takes dead aim at the tendency to boil down Christianity into a series of formulaic steps. (Four spiritual laws, "A-B-C", etc.)

Instead, Miller describes Christianity exclusively in relational terms. Starting with an exposition of Genesis 2 & 3, Miller suggests that we are created by God such that we define ourselves, and derive our sense of who we are, from outside ourselves. Initially, that sense of identity and value came from God. But, as a consequence of the Fall, we began to seek our sense of identity from one another, with disastrous relational consequences.

Miller uses the analogy of an overcrowded lifeboat to describe our situation. Everyone on the lifeboat is concerned with winning allies, proving their worth, so they won't get thrown overboard. One is reminded of *Survivor*, or the all-too-numerous reality TV contests, where each week, one contestant is voted off the show.

Miller argues that real life, apart from God, feels just like that. It's as if we're constantly trying to impress one another with our worth, our being "right" or "good", so that we won't get thrown overboard. "Lifeboat politics", Miller argues, explains everything from rabid sports fans to political partisanship to war.

In contrast, Jesus, whose relationship with God remains perfect, is depicted in the Gospels as interacting with people absolutely unconcerned with how people will view him. He befriends prostitutes, tax collectors, and other outcasts without fearing that he will somehow lose his status or worth, which is secure in his perfect relationship with the Father.

In the church, we have the opportunity to approximate that kind of acceptance, and to, if not banish, at least question the lifeboat politics we all struggle with.

Miller's basic point is that the Christian life can't be defined in simple steps, but rather in the

complex and mysterious calculus of intimate relationships. He closes the book with a chapter suggesting that the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet* is a deep description of the kind of love and sacrifice that characterizes our relationship with God.