

Wilson, Jared C. *Gospel-Driven Ministry: An Introduction to the Calling and Work of a Pastor*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021. 234 pp.

Gospel-Driven Ministry: An Introduction to the Calling and Work of a Pastor, by Jared C. Wilson, enters a strong field of modern works that provide a means of training and mentoring the next generation of pastors. Wilson is employed as assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Spurgeon College and author in residence at Midwestern Baptist Seminary. Having served in pastoral ministry previously, he currently directs the Pastoral Training Center (PTC) at his local church, Liberty Baptist Church, in Liberty, Missouri.⁵ *Gospel-Driven Ministry* coordinates in design and follows closely on the heels of his previous book, *Gospel-Driven Church* (2019), which proved helpful in promoting a “Gospel-Driven” philosophy of ministry—a biblical, convictional alternative to the attractional-church mindset of a large segment of Evangelicalism.

Wilson wrote *Gospel-Driven Ministry* to “show the ways in which those given the stewardship of [gospel ministry]—pastors of local churches—must meditate on it, proclaim it, and adorn it with their lives (and their deaths)” (7). A ministry that is Gospel-centered will, according to Wilson, be “given the strength and joy to carry out this momentous task” (7).

Wilson begins with a chapter on “The Pastor,” where he lays out the modern dilemma: “Ministers today are expected to be gifted public speakers and catalytic leaders, yet very little else. The CEO model of ministry dominates” (9). He describes and decries the consumeristic mindset of many churches regarding their pastoral expectations. Wilson spends the remainder of chapter one presenting a biblical description of a pastor’s role, work, qualifications, calling and commissioning. In an era of high-profile pastoral failures, he rightly emphasizes the need for a personal calling matched by a qualified life.

Wilson’s work is particularly notable for rooting the qualifications of a pastor in the affirmation of a local church. He writes, “The pastoral office is undeniably connected to a local congregation . . . the role of pastor is inextricably connected to a particular people for whom and to whom the pastor is covenantally responsible. Only a church . . . grants that person the title ‘Pastor’—a seminary degree or an ordination certificate alone does not” (23). He concludes poignantly: “someone who wants to serve over a church should be a product of a church” (24). This is sage advice in the context of the parachurch locus of most ministerial training.

His next chapter on “The Power” focuses on the necessity of the pastor to believe in and make use of the transformative power of the gospel in ministry. Especially helpful is his encouragement to pastors to find their ministry identity in faithful gospel work. This will protect pastors both from “seeking to be impressive” and from feelings of failure if one “never sees tremendous growth” (40).

In chapter three, “Worshiping,” Wilson opines that “Disordered worship is the major disease threatening every local church,” leading to tangential problems like politics in the church, an

⁵ The PTC is an eighteen-month cohort-based process in which participants will collaborate in discussions on assigned readings, undergo group and individual coaching, and receive on-the-ground ministry experience. See <https://www.lbcliberty.org/ptc>.

imbalanced social gospel emphasis, and biblical illiteracy (45–46). The solution offered is three-fold: adoration [personal] study, prayerful preparation, and exultational exposition, where one preaches with passion that is formed through study and prayer.

Chapters four and five are focused on the work of preaching itself. Preaching, Wilson states, is more than “informational download” (58). Preaching is “proclamation that exults in exposing God’s glory in Christ . . . all martialled toward the only power to change” (59–61). With an alliterative preacher’s outline in mind, the author instructs that sermons must be contextual, convictional, clear, compassionate, and cross-centered (61–66). Wilson does an excellent job of linking preaching to pastoring, taking issue with multisite or online/video sermons. He writes that the preacher who focuses more on preaching than shepherding and who is “less and less involved with his congregation, is actually undermining the task to which he is trying to devote more time” (67). Faithful shepherds preach, knowing their people and their context, while expositing the Word with empathy. Following this charge is a very helpful survey of reasons an expositional ministry is best for the long-term health of a church. Chapter five focuses on presenting a practical method for sermon preparation, including some thoughtful reasons for manuscripting one’s sermons.

Amid his instruction on preaching, Wilson gives some helpful cautions regarding sermon illustrations. He says, “You shouldn’t trust your illustration to do what only God’s Word can do” (94). While many books on homiletics give much attention to illustration, *Gospel-Driven Ministry* keeps illustrations in their proper place. Also included in chapter five are instructions on preaching at weddings, funerals and during the ordinances. Wilson provides both practical advice and cautions in these special preaching situations.

Chapter six provides a solid survey of the nature, heart, practice, and principles of pastoral care and pastoral counseling. Particularly helpful are his encouragements to “validate feelings without affirming assumptions” so that people have a safe place to express themselves while you pastorally bring the Word to bear on their circumstances, giving the Spirit time to work (134–135). In an age where much counseling has become professionalized, Wilson encourages pastors that, even when referring people to outside counselors, that counsel becomes “a complement to—not a replacement for—your pastoral care” (136).

In the next chapter on “Leading,” the author provides what seems like a “catch-all” of leadership principles. This chapter is best used in context with personal conversations with pastoral trainees, while sharing one’s own ministry experience. In reading this chapter, one feels like Wilson may have wanted to write an entire book on leadership but is instead trying to distill several principles into one chapter. In summary, the pastor must keep in mind the connection between one’s “leadership skills” and “pastoral sensibilities” (143).

“Fighting (And Making Peace)” brings the reader into the realm of pastoral conflict. The author helpfully identifies the spheres of conflict—that conflict is not primarily between pastors and their flock. While some conflict is between the pastor and an individual, all conflict includes the activity of Satan and our own sinful flesh. Often conflict involves “wolves” who are primarily concerned to destroy unity in a local church through sowing discord or false doctrine. Wilson encourages pastors to make use of biblical church discipline to protect the church as a whole (171). God can use hostility

and conflict for His good purposes, being mindful that “the Lord, in his wisdom, has stewarded this situation to you . . . not to prove your greatness, but to prove his” (179).

The final two chapters on “Living” and “Dying” provide advice for long-term ministry fruitfulness. Self-care is urged. Through prayerful dependence, “establishing rhythms for healthy ministry” (195 ff.), and actively avoiding burnout by prioritizing rest and setting margins, pastors can trust that “normal ministry will produce fruit” (211). On considering death, Wilson quotes C. S. Lewis’ popular phrase “Die before you die. There is no chance after.” Wilson aptly quips that “the truth is, there are a million little deaths to die along the road to the big one” (217).

Negative criticisms of the book are relatively few. While the reader may desire more depth in each section, one should not expect *Gospel-Driven Ministry* to go beyond its purpose. It is not intended to replace the classics of Bridges, Spurgeon, and Baxter. It is a good modern introductory complement to these. Wilson is not always clear on hermeneutical principles—occasionally applying OT teaching to the NT church context. For instance, he describes the call to pastoral ministry as “no less supernatural” than the direct-revelatory calls of those in the OT and NT. He also describes the calling to ministry as “still a miracle” (17). This can be confusing for those simply burdened for ministry and “desiring the office of an overseer” (1 Tm 3:1) who may not have experienced anything supernatural. He also roots some of his argument for a plurality of elders too firmly in the Exodus 18 account of Moses’ needing to delegate leadership duties (21–22). One is left desiring more positive illustrations. Most of his ministry illustrations reflect conversations or circumstances that went awry, rather than those that went well. These are relatively minor critiques considering the whole work, however.

Positively, Wilson’s writing style is engaging, with a mixture of scriptural teaching and personal illustrations throughout each chapter. His conclusion “On the Readiness to Pastor” is purposefully gospel centered. New pastors should expect this work to provide some structure and form to preparation, but overall, the greatest need is to know the people one is called to pastor (224) and to experience the power of the gospel personally (226). Wilson is clearly committed to the sufficiency of a biblical model of pastoral ministry. Refreshingly, there isn’t much in the book that makes one want to be a follower of Wilson himself. Rather, the reader is driven to be a faithful gospel minister.

Gospel-Driven Ministry provides an accessible, readable introduction to pastoral ministry. It is a valuable option for introductory pastoral theology classes. It particularly seems useful for the kind of context in which Wilson is involved, where an experienced pastor reads through the chapter with prospective pastoral candidates, while discussing one’s own experience. Closing each chapter are “For Reflection” and “For Further Study:” sections. Wilson has provided a very helpful addition to practical theology training.

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