

Jamieson, Bobby. *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 124 pp. + 23 pp. (back matter).

How does a man know whether to pursue pastoral ministry, and how should he move towards that goal once he is persuaded to do so? Is the answer as simple (or complicated) as his sensing a call, enrolling in a Bible college and seminary, then serving as an assistant pastor while waiting for a church to call him as a lead pastor? Is this even the right approach? In a biblical and methodical manner, Jamieson attempts to answer this question with *The Path to Being a Pastor*. With this book he hopes to guide a man's desire to be a pastor "from seed to fruition," offering guidance for taking deliberate and meaningful steps towards achieving this aspiration.

To accomplish this task, Jamieson follows a Scripture-oriented strategy. He titles and focuses each chapter (twenty-seven in total) with an imperative, which he either draws from Scripture directly or "distills and deploys" from the "sense of Scripture" as he understands it. He maintains this focus consistently throughout the book by quoting the Scripture verse(s) that undergird each chapter at the outset of each chapter. Then he develops a key truth from these verses throughout each respective chapter. If the reader expects a rigorous exegetical or technical examination of these key verses, he or she will be disappointed. Jamieson is not writing for an academically sophisticated audience. He is writing to men who are considering pastoral ministry, whether they have acquired advanced linguistic and theological skills yet or not. Consequently, he has chosen a winsome, insightful, compact, and accessible style that accentuates biblical truths and applies them to the question of pursuing pastoral ministry.

The author arranges his material into three main parts: Finding the Path (four chapters), Walking the Path (nineteen chapters), and Approaching the Destination (four chapters). He also provides a thorough general index and extensive Scripture index afterwards—the latter revealing a strong reliance on NT references, which corresponds suitably to the NT nature of his topic. Many chapters, though not all, feature a set of standard endnotes—some of which commend additional resources pertaining to the topic addressed in the chapter. Each chapter is both brief and substantive, and each is well-suited for brief mentorship or training discussions, though suggested discussion questions are absent from the end of each chapter and would be a welcome addition to any future editions.

In Part 1, Finding the Path, the author encourages an aspiring pastor to foster heartfelt humility, which invites outside criticism and crucifies prideful ambition. He also upholds biblical, epistolary qualifications and promotes seeking wise counsel, especially from within a man's current congregation—offering a helpful diagram that demonstrates the value of balancing ability, desire, and opportunity within the local church. But the author offers his most helpful (or controversial) perspective of Part 1 in Chapter 1 when he says, "Instead of saying 'I'm called to ministry,' say 'I aspire to be a pastor'" (17). Jamieson observes that the NT nowhere uses "call" language to describe God's leading into pastoral ministry. He further suggests that to say, "God has called me to be a pastor," is presumptive and that this phraseology fosters an unhealthy sense of entitlement. Therefore, he recommends replacing "I am called" with "I aspire," terminology that he believes is more biblical,

humble, accurate, fruitful, and freeing. In Chapter 1, it is worth noting that the author presents “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” as interchangeable terms for the same office, while also recognizing that some—though not all—pastors should be remunerated.

In Part 2, *Walking the Path*, the author offers an extended series of points of advice for men who “aspire” to become a pastor. He presents this advice in no apparent order or priority—whether logical, chronological, or otherwise. Nor does he develop each point or follow any clear persistent theme. Even so, core values such as personal preparation and practical experience repeatedly shine through in tangible and concrete ways. This observation makes clear that Jamieson strongly recommends an active approach rather than a passive “wait and see” one— an approach that will require patience and persistence on the part of an aspiring pastor.

In the opening chapter of this section, Jamieson urges an aspiring pastor to be an observant, involved member of a church. This is crucial advice for sure, but some pastors may pause when he says, “If you desire to pastor but are not, and have never been, a member of a healthy church, I would strongly urge you to join a thriving, mature church” (45). Though this advice should cause nonmembers to join a biblical church, will it also embolden some aspiring pastoral candidates to abandon a good church for another that they deem to be more “thriving” and healthy? By failing to give a clear explanation of what constitutes a “thriving, mature” church, apart from being a church that develops and mentors aspiring pastors, Jamieson leaves this detail open to interpretation.

Despite this minor quibble, Jamieson provides a wealth of advice that, if embraced, will equip a man to pursue his pastoral aspirations with godly maturity and wisdom. At one point he even offers helpful guidance to pastors who intend to mentor aspiring pastors by detailing the process of an effective apprenticeship model, citing Andrew Wilson: “I do—you watch—we talk. I do—you help—we talk. You do—I help—we talk. You do—I watch—we talk. You do—someone else watches” (69). Jamieson’s advice is thorough, spanning church, family, and personal zones. The reader will especially appreciate his three-chapter focus on attending to family duties. Regarding the role of seminary training in pastoral preparedness, Jamieson states: “My counsel in this chapter is simple: if you can, make the most of seminary.” Then he qualifies his counsel by saying, “Not everyone can or should” (98). With this advice, he offers a thoughtful and reasonable perspective that encourages seminary training without insisting on it universally.

In Part 3, *Approaching the Destination*, the author gives final recommendations for aspiring pastors to consider when the opportunity arrives to step into a pastoral role. He differentiates between godly and ungodly ambition and makes perceptive points about accepting an assistant pastor role only after the pastoral candidate has determined that he and the lead pastor will be compatible. For instance, he warns well when he says, “Beware of the vague succession plan” (116). He also offers valuable guidance for “candidating candidly” and concludes with a crucial reminder to “cherish Christ.”

Jamieson writes this book with the advantage of experience. Though not a lead pastor himself, he writes as one of the pastors at Capitol Hill Baptist, a church which hosts an intense, full-time, reputable pastoral training internship program, which the author himself oversees. Furthermore, he “aspired” to be a pastor for eleven years before becoming one; so a healthy dose of empathy permeates the biblical advice that he shares with his readers. These factors qualify Jamieson to write this book.

Though many books have been written about how to be a godly and effective pastor, few have been written about how to *become* a pastor. This book fills that void and therefore meets a real need in the church today. It will help any man who wonders whether he should pursue pastoral ministry and will make both an excellent reading assignment for pastoral church interns and a worthy undergraduate- or master's-level textbook. It will even help a lead pastor or pastoral team develop a philosophy or strategy for guiding, training, and mentoring pastoral candidates within the church.

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