

Before We Forget: Reflections from New and Seasoned Pastors on Enduring Ministry, edited by Nathan Millican and Jonathon Woodyard. Nashville: B&H Books, 2020. x + 213 pp. \$16.99.

Editors and authors Nathan Millican and Jonathon Woodyard have brought together fourteen other pastors addressing eight concerns that contribute to a ministry that perseveres. A young pastor addresses each ministry concern offering sections such as *Thinking Biblically* and *Before I (We) Forget*. A seasoned pastor follows each chapter topic with a 2.0 version. Their desire is that these reflections will serve all pastors as they try to minister faithfully for the good of Christ's body and the glory of God (2). They state that "it has been our aim, hope, and prayer that our openness and acknowledgement of our sin and struggle compel you to do the same: be people who uncover their sins, acknowledge their struggle, and enlist the help of brothers and sisters around you to help you in your pursuit of Jesus as the better and more infinite way (Heb. 11:16) and fight unmercifully against sin" (209).

The following comprise the topics addressed along with their 2.0 versions: *The Insecure Pastor*, *The Perils of Pride*, *Don't Take the Pastorate for Granted*, *Character Matters*, *The Pastor and Sexual Purity*, *Patience in the Pastorate*, *The Hard Work in Reconciliation*, and *The Pastor and the Suffering Family*. Often introductions and conclusions are an afterthought, but here they are both informative and necessary. The introduction is titled *A Theology of Remembrance*. Since we are prone to forget what God has taught us, the whole book functions as an exercise in remembrance (2, 212). They believe that seeing God's work in others will help us in our fight for faithfulness (5). The conclusion is titled *A Theology of Confession*, summarizing this book as an exercise in the discipline of confession—an all-too-absent feature in the life of the minister (208).

Three sections were stellar. First, *Don't Take the Pastorate for Granted*, where ministers are encouraged not to do so in the areas of: (1) administering the ordinances; (2) preaching the word; (3) leading on mission; and (4) the funerals of saints—funerals are a reminder to enjoy life as a gift from God and our pastoral joy and trophy are the saints we help get safely to glory (67–70). Next, *Patience in the Pastorate* was extremely informative and beneficial, for ministers should do everything "with great patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). We are to be patient: (1) in loving; (2) in preaching—"Pastors, if your first sermons are on unconditional election or limited atonement, you're not a theological warrior and purist; you are probably just an idiot. And if your first move is to abolish committees or deacons and install elders, then more than likely you shouldn't be one yourself" (144); and (3) in suffering—we love and teach them in suffering and at times, suffer with them (141–46). Last, *The Hard Work of Reconciliation* is a much-needed word, for our pursuit of reconciliation is based on our reconciliation to God and our calling by him as ministers of reconciliation (173). In so doing we will: (1) forgive people whether they want it or not (Forgiveness is a

choice. It is a commitment. It is not a feeling); (2) think the best of people; and (3) constantly elevate the health and beauty of the bride (175–177).

Several positives merit mention. First, though drawing from experience, each author looks to find an answer that is biblically informed. Next, the genuineness and transparency of the authors is commendable. Finally, there are many nuggets worth remembering:

- “A believer who desires to fight sin but neglects to immerse himself in the Bible is like a soldier who wants to storm an enemy stronghold without guidance from his leaders or weapons from the armory” (41).
- “When it is time to confess anything, it is amazing how fear and pride can lead you to think irrationally” (83).
- “Be warned. Your character does not automatically keep pace with other skills. Don’t confuse growth in one area as growth in the other” (85).

One of the very things that is a strength, is at the same time a point of concern—the genuineness and transparency of the authors “might make you uncomfortable at times” (vii). While these virtues are commendable one might wish that the *Theology of Confession* had a more practical outworking. For instance, there is a very candid discussion about personal sexual sin (104, 116, 117, 123–24). While it is true that ministers may not share/confess “because [they] do not want to give the impression that [they] fail to meet the biblical qualifications for ministry” (204), still transparent confession should align with biblical wisdom. While the gospel, the cross of Christ and genuine forgiveness are proper motivations (112), as well as our purity (121), it seems a fully expressed theology of confession would set more clearly defined biblical parameters: (1) all sin is ultimately against God and should be confessed to him (Ps 51:4); (2) confess your sins to one another for the sake of reconciliation (Matt 5:23–24; 18:15–17); (3) confess your sins for the sake of mutual edification/forgiveness (Jas 5:16); and (4) godly wisdom and discretion should prevail when confessing sin privately or publicly to/with people (Jas 1:5).

However, that one concern does not diminish the book’s value. This work is pastoral and personal, enlightening both the minister’s personal walk and the ministry he stewards. I would commend this book to the faithful layman or the minister looking to hone certain ministry disciplines. As for the academy, there are other works preferred, such as the more insightful *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart* (Lexham, 2019) by Harold L. Senkbeil or the theologically rich *Pastoral Theology: Theological Foundations for Who a Pastor is and What He Does* (B&H, 2017) by Daniel L. Akin and R. Scott Pace. It is true in ministry that the difference between failure and faithfulness is our walk with God, as co-laborers and “fellow strugglers whose citizenship is in heaven, [we long] for the day where there will be no struggle” (203).

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