



## Book Reviews

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**Brown, C. B. (2015). *Guiding Gideon: Awakening to Life and Faith*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.**

Reviewed by Ps Andrew Groza

You do not need to look too far into the Christian tradition to encounter the role that spiritual guides have played in the lives of wandering pilgrims, particularly those seeking formation into the image and likeness of Christ. Christopher Basil Brown's new book *Guiding Gideon* is an encouragement to embrace such a role. In an individualised culture such as Australia, the concept that fellow members of God's family can act as prayerful guides and companions on the journey of spiritual formation may seem a little odd, but Brown would argue otherwise – as would centuries of Christian history. Brown contends that God has an image in mind of what we can become, and has deposited that inside us all. The spiritual guide's richest privilege and gravest responsibility is to walk alongside their brothers and sisters in Christ, discern what the Spirit may be doing, and help prompt them to cooperate with the Spirit – oftentimes, this means facing areas of deepest pain. The outcome, however, is a rich relationship in which the person being guided is restored and formed into the person God desires them to be, and in which the guide also experiences growth and restoration. "In preparing to step through the doorway of Gideon's anguish and journey with him along a path of death and resurrection, I would need to drink this living water and press into this powerful and abundant love, for I, too, am being redeemed and restored to the fullness of the Creator's imagining" (p. xviii).

Brown uses a novel method for communicating this if you can excuse the pun. He creates a fictional account of a successful 34-year-old man named Gideon, who is a composite of Brown's clients, and a fictional spiritual guide named Julian. The narrative follows a consistent pattern. The two characters meet for a one-on-one session in which Julian prayerfully and carefully directs Gideon to address the issues that are most pressing and in which God has obviously been at work in the weeks between sessions. Following this is a chapter where Julian prayerfully reflects on the session and allows the Spirit to draw him further along his own journey. The pattern then repeats. The reader is privileged to be an observer in Gideon's awakening as he is transformed from a young man struggling with distress, depression, and deep wounds into a man whose

aching soul is no longer driving him to achieve but is alive to God and others around him.

The construction of the narrative, however, makes it difficult to remain fully engaged. I will give two examples. The first is that although Brown's prose is pleasant to read, it often uses terminology that may be difficult for the uninitiated to follow, with phrases such as "... open the doorway into his darkened interior wide enough for both of us to enter" (p. xv), and "the Creator's formative imagination" (p. xvii). Readers from outside a more contemplative tradition therefore, may find it difficult to clearly comprehend what Brown is seeking to communicate. The second is that Julian often reflects back to Gideon what Gideon has just said, and though this adds to the realism of the narrative, making the reader feel like they are watching a real-life counselling session, it eventually gets wearying to read the sentence twice.

A further difficulty with the book is that in almost every session between the pair, Gideon seems to experience supernatural encounters, something that tends to distance it from reality. Ordinary human experience does not seem to accord with what seems to be a common occurrence between these two individuals. It appears that the Spirit constantly leads Gideon's imagination and Julian's wise guiding, and the outcome is some form of positive restoration, despite the very real anguish that Gideon sometimes faces. This also leads to most sessions ending with a sense of resolution, which again, I find difficult to reconcile with my experience as a pastor.

This book would be of benefit to anyone who is interested in the spiritual guiding process, giving an ideal (perhaps an idealized?) vision of what that could look like. Pastors and counsellors who are concerned about participating in the work of the Spirit would also do well to read this book. I began reading this book with the hope to learn something for my own inner journey (especially since Gideon and I share the same age), and it accomplished that. There were moments in Gideon's sessions where he confronted sacred wounds and I felt the Spirit's gentle probing of my heart, confirming that I may need to address something similar. Furthermore, it taught me to be more attentive to the Spirit's working, to the events of life, and to my thoughts and feelings. I was reassured that the Spirit is always at work, and my desire to have eyes to see and to cooperate was renewed. As a result, *Guiding Gideon* also stirred my faith. Despite all my failings and doubts, God the great guide is restoring me to the person that he sees, the deeper me, and enveloping me in the "cloak of Trinitarian love" (p. 65). May that process, never end.

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**Cartledge, M. J. (2015). *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon Newton

Practical theology studies church and ministry, often using a social scientific perspective. However, sometimes evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal Christians can feel like important points are missing, particularly in the areas of Evangelical theology and Charismatic pneumatology. Mark Cartledge, who is now Professor of Practical Theology at Regent University School of Divinity in the USA, having been an academic and Anglican priest in the UK for many years, is one of the leading voices speaking into practical theology from a Charismatic perspective. This is also the strategy of his most recent book.

Cartledge argues that the discourse of practical theology has suffered from a lack of serious engagement with Scripture and insufficient focus on several theological perspectives (specifically the Trinity, soteriology, systematic theology and pneumatology). As a result, it has tended to be dominated by largely sociological and other social scientific ways of thinking, liberal perspectives, and forms of liberation theology. These are not invalid of course, but practical theology needs a series of “interventions” to redress the balance and enrich the study of churches and ministry from a wider horizon.

Cartledge begins his monograph with a discussion of existing Pentecostal and Charismatic approaches to practical theology, with the focus on topics such as formation, worship, and ministry. He explores how P/C (Pentecostal-Charismatic) approaches have been influenced by, and interacted with, liberation theology and empirical theology, territory he has explored in earlier books, and opens up the topic of experience (Chapter 1). He then discusses six common approaches to the use of the Bible in practical theology, concluding that the Bible has largely been marginalized in this discourse, before proposing a practical-theological reading of Scripture. This is followed by a discussion of the place of experience in practical theology, which shows that religious experience has been similarly marginalized; leading to the suggestion that P/C pneumatology offers new possibilities in this area (Chapter 2).

Cartledge’s main argument then begins by unpacking a relatively new concept, the “mediation of the Holy Spirit.” Cartledge urges that “this concept is informed by Pentecostal experience and associated empowerment, is shaped by specific theological foci, and is expressed in ecclesial practices, especially sacramental practices broadly conceived” (Chapter 3 p. 87). He explores how this concept is worked out in the Acts of the Apostles; specifically, how the work of the Spirit is mediated, in and through the church, and how this relates to some key theological themes. This discussion provides a platform for “an agenda for interventions in practical theology” (Chapter 4 p. 1130).

The remaining chapters build on this discussion by applying the idea of the mediation of the Spirit to make two specific “interventions” in the discourse of practical theology. In the first of these, an existing study of a Christian congregation is faulted for its inadequate pneumatology and lack of engagement with Scripture, and from this, Cartledge suggests that a P/C perspective would add greater insight to such studies (Chapter 5). The second “intervention” seeks to bring soteriology to the fore as an example of the inadequate theological content in common practical theologies. After surveying four kinds of soteriology in previous practical theological works, Cartledge brings a P/C theologian, Amos Yong, into the conversation. He then attempts to draw on his concept of the Spirit’s mediation to provide a new take on soteriology in practical theology, particularly in relation to the recipients, the nature and the process of salvation (Chapter 6).

Cartledge concludes his discussion with a summary of what he thinks he has achieved in trying to bring practical and Pentecostal theology into a new dialogue. He contends, “P/C theology brings together the use of Scripture with experience and pneumatology” (p. 165), and that his discussion of this undergirds “a Pentecostal manifesto for practical theology as a distinct discipline” (p. 166). He then proceeds to unpack this manifesto with ten conclusions about how practical theology can benefit from greater attention to the themes of his book and generally from opening its discourse to more voices outside the liberal academy.

The strength of this book lies in its argument for a more Pentecostal or Charismatic approach to practical theology as a perspective that has something important to offer the study of Christian churches and ministries. Cartledge's proposals have the potential to bring greater depth and strength to the study of practical theology by making it both more practical (in the sense of spiritual experience and praxis) and more theological (in the sense of going to Scripture as a source and bringing theological themes like soteriology into the analysis of practical theological topics).

On the other hand, I found the argument lacked a consistent focus. The book often reads like a series of loosely connected essays rather than a focused argument and some of the ideas, like "mediation of the Spirit", lacked concrete shape and empirical clarity to this reader.

Nonetheless, there is a lot to value in this contribution to the discourse of practical theology and I suspect that many of the individual discussions in it will inform and inspire further thinking and debate for years to come.

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**Gibbs. E. (2013). *The Rebirth of the Church: Applying Paul's Vision for Ministry in Our Post-Christian World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.**

Reviewed by Ps Grant Buchanan

The opening line of Gibbs' book sets a provocative and challenging foundation for much of his discussion,

In most places in the Western world, churches are declining in membership and social influence. As they find themselves increasingly marginalized and unable to count on the support of the communities they are meant to serve, they are finding that long-established approaches to ministry ... no longer have the broad appeal that they had for previous generations (p. ix).

The primary agenda of the book is put forward soon afterwards namely, "...what will [a missional ecclesiology] look like in post-Christendom Western settings?" (p. ix). Through engagement with Paul's letters (although Gibbs admits he is not a Pauline scholar), in light of changing political and cultural challenges faced by the church today, Gibbs considers what adjustments we need to make to address these changes and the resulting decline of influence, in order for the church to be relevant and influential into the future.

The issues laid out in the introduction sets up the argument that the core problem is institutionalism. Gibbs employs terms such as post-Christendom, missional and specifically Christendom to discuss the institutionalisation of the church that developed post-Constantine. This is represented by an attractional rather than a missional/sending mode of engagement, dedicated "sacred buildings/places of worship ... more static and institutional in form" professional clergy, and the "institutionalization of grace in the form of sacraments ..." (p. 4). This institutionalisation of the church shifted its focus from orthopraxy to orthodoxy. This shift enabled Christendom to resist external cultural and political movements over the past 1500 years that could have changed, if not eradicated, the face of Christianity. Unfortunately, this same resiliency has also negatively affected the church's ability to adapt to recent social shifts brought on by capitalism, individualism, secularization, and pluralism, all prevalent within Western society today. This resistance to change has meant that, since the 1960's, the

church has been “pushed to the margins” of society and “radically changed both the nature of ... ministry and ... mission ...” (p. 8).

In the world of post-Christendom, churches are hamstrung by the “theological and social consequences of a reductionist gospel, with a concern for “personal piety and life after death.” Individualizing the message of the gospel led to a privatized form of religion, a division of time between sacred and secular, with a subsequent adoption of “marketplace” norms (p. 11). The place of the church within dysfunctionally fragmented societies is a further challenge. In most Western communities, the trust in institutions is eroding and dissatisfaction with leaders in every sphere, including the church, is now a social reality. Drawing on Phillip Blond’s analysis of the situation in Britain, Gibbs highlights how the fragmentation of society has also led to a fragmentation of self, where relationship bonds are also eroding “so our very humanity comes under threat” (p. 16).

These social realities pose the challenge of how “to recreate a geographical sense of community in a twenty-first-century world” (p. 19). Furthermore, there is a growing pluralism and relativism evident within non-Christian cultures and society. How will the church respond? Gibbs suggests that we must re-imagine Western churches in post-Christian contexts through the lens of a missional ecclesiology. This approach requires creativity and a realigning of the processes of Church ministry and mission that consider the shifting nature of society – shifts that are not linear or always logical – while, at the same time, seeking for ways to engage the message and model of Jesus incarnationally and transformatively (p. 26).

Gibbs then presents a reconstruction of the first-century context of Paul and the early church. He discusses the nature of Greco-Roman society in order to highlight the setting for Paul’s mission. Cities (including the particular cities where Paul established churches), neighbourhoods, houses, families, individuals, social status, and social structures are included in this discussion. Paul’s communities were, like the church today, marginalized groups within their particular social context, which had to contend with political and religious values and societal norms that challenged Christianity. After arguing that Paul’s strategy was to engage the social realities and specific needs within each centre, where these did not contradict Christian values, Gibbs suggests that this same paradigm of engagement should inform a missional community today (pp. 52-54). Each of these Pauline settings provides us with insight as to how we might address the various external and internal concerns confronting us as we look to establish a missional community within our various local contexts. Gibbs suggests that effective missional communities start with existing relationships (familial and friendship networks), allow for the gospel to challenge divergent norms, utilize the vibrancy of new converts, face the challenges of growing ethnic diversities within local communities, and have a vision for, and understanding of, cities as centres for sending out (p. 88).

Much of what follows from this point represent perhaps quite standard things to consider when planting new churches and caring for these churches. Ultimately, the call of a missional leadership is to create “life-long apprentices of Jesus” (p. 111, 168). The last three chapters are taken up with outlining ‘The Apostolic Message’ (basically a short course in systematic theology); ‘Relationships within the Church and with the World’ (confronting individualism with *koinonia* and love); and a concluding chapter bridging ministry and mission, both then and now. Gibbs concludes with six defining

characteristics of faithful congregations seen in Paul's writing: relational, reproducible, incarnational, faithful, resourceful, hopeful, – all applicable to churches today.

Overall, I was mildly disappointed with this book – especially as I have thoroughly enjoyed Gibbs' previous works. He draws from a wide range of established missional thinkers, presents his themes clearly and exegetes Paul's letters with accuracy and insight. His historical overview and engagement with the first-century context provided valuable insight into the social, religious, and political similarities of the two horizons – then and now. However, much of what he presents has been explored and presented in various forms over the past decade, and the latter portion of the book could easily fit any recent standard ecclesiology text. That being said, this is a worthwhile read for anyone looking to either establish a new church community, or consider ways to lead and develop an existing church community within a changing social context, to be connected, relevant and influential in that context.

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**Haddad, A. P. (2015). *Arise to Lead: 5 Fundamentals to Becoming an Effective Leader*. Houston, TX: High Bridge Books.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon Newton

We have all seen the plethora of books on leadership from various Christian authors, some practitioners, and some researchers of leadership in a Christian context. Is there anything more to be said? This book is different, not because of its autobiographical basis (nothing new in that) but because it starts with failure. That failure, unusually, is located in a research laboratory, not a church: this author is a former scientist, though now filling a significant role at Harvest Bible College in Melbourne, lecturing on leadership at postgraduate level, and coaching others in leadership.

So this book provides hope that failure in leadership is not final (see p. 159, but this is the message of the whole book). Haddad tells readers how he reconstructed himself as a young leader, seeking advice and mentoring, reading widely, taking specialized training and even researching for a doctorate in leadership. With humility, he embarked on a great learning journey. This book is structured around the main points he learned and the strengths he had lacked in the beginning:

1. Awakening your potential to lead (*authenticity*)
2. Resourcing your learning (*agility*)
3. Integrating your life and actions (*accountability*)
4. Socially relating to others (*approachability*)
5. Executing your leadership potential (*abilities*)

Under these five themes, he discusses important leadership qualities such as values, curiosity, courage and consistency.

Haddad urges that leaders are not born so much as made; that is, even mediocre leaders can succeed if they really *want* to be leaders. However, he also unveils some of the symptoms of leadership that is in trouble, such as a lack of respect (pp. 12, 174-175). One of the most engaging sections of the book for me was the two chapters on change and challenge (Chapters 10 & 11). Here the author uses the stories of two executives who faced similar threatening changes through company restructuring, but responded in contrasting fashion, to explore the dangers and opportunities for growth

that come with change that you did not necessarily desire or plan for. The lesson is that you cannot control events or even get a favourable outcome in many cases, but you do not have to be destroyed by that; you can instead grow as a leader.

Many of the points made in this book are based on surveys of participants in Haddad's workshops, for example, the Good, the Bad and the Ugly leadership characteristics (pp. 13-14). Some points draw on the research of others, such as Avolio's research on "types of events [that] shaped the leadership of CEOs in six Asian cities" (p. 241). There are many useful insights derived from experience, research, and reading. Some of these are counterintuitive, such as "unethical and immoral leaders get away with selfish behaviors as long as they give attention to their followers' basic needs and reward their performance" (p. 41).

Most chapters open with a typical story that invites the reader into the topic under consideration. There is then an analysis of the topic, often illustrated by further stories (frequently from the author's own life), including solid advice to the reader (usually in the form of "dot points"). The chapter then closes with several reflection questions.

One of the best features of this book was its analysis of the character aspects of leadership. These qualities are well known but not many books unpack them as well as Haddad does. For example, when discussing commitment, he offers these points for "growing your commitment quotient": promise little and deliver more; be committed to something with lasting value and purpose, something that is linked to your passion; be committed to a wise and supportive accountability team; be committed to people even when it is not convenient or easy; be committed to relationships even through difficult times; and be committed to something that is for the benefit of the many although it may be beyond your personal endurance level (pp. 73-76). Biblical principles and sayings are used in some of these discussions but the book is not overtly Christian or religious.

The book reads more like a series of seminars than a sustained argument. There are memorable sayings and alliterative headings, which ultimately grated on this reader, even though the advice was sound. At times, it was hard to come away with a strong focus from so many "dot points." So perhaps the best way to use this book is as a workbook for a course on leadership. That said, this book has great value for the actual or potential leader in all walks of life.

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**Hall, E., Bowman, R., & Macher, J. S. (2014). *The More With Less Church: Maximize Your Money, Space, Time, and People to Multiply Ministry Impact*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing.**

Reviewed by Ps Jeremy Weetman  
Kindle edition

The ministry that the authors are a part of, Living Stones Associates, is a church consultancy business that has been advising churches for over thirty years. Their book is a valuable tool for all churches on how to leverage existing resources for maximum effectiveness and gives creative ideas for church health and growth interspersed with testimonies and real-life applications. As the authors note in the introduction, "[t]his book explores the principles and strategies that have guided ... churches to do more ministry with limited resources, even during financially challenging times" (loc. 267).

The book is divided into four clear subject areas of ministry, staffing, buildings, and finances. Within each section, the chapters are clearly defined to allow the reader to focus on areas of specific interest. The chapter titles are intentionally provocative, at times seeming to challenge conventional wisdom and practice, but are really suggesting a re-organisation or re-structure to clarify and simplify methods and values.

The first two major sections, on ministry and staffing, arguably could be one larger section since they overlap in subject matter and assume a church with a predominantly paid staff. This does not devalue the information but requires contextualisation. This is a common necessity in reading the book given the cultural context for the ministry experience and application is that of North America. Of particular value is chapter nine, "To Make Big Changes, Start with Baby Steps," as it gives very practical insights and suggestions into how best to begin making some of the changes advocated in the book. At first, I wondered if this would not be better as the first chapter, but in hindsight, it is better placed at the end of the first section when the benefits that the suggested changes make possible are realised and embraced. As the authors explain, you have to, 'change values before you change structures' (loc. 1072), which they assert is the key to initiating change without crashing.

Since such a large part of leading a church revolves around change management, this chapter alone is worth the price of the book. In addition, I found Part 3: "More-with-less-buildings" an excellent section since it deals with issues that are vital to church ministry and yet are often neglected in church leadership materials. One of the authors, Ray Bowman, is an architect and contributes his own story as well as important insights into this section. The multi-functional use of church buildings is common, but the authors expand these uses with consideration of creative re-purposing of buildings and facilities to best serve the needs and vision of the faith community. They give consideration to the best way to add a new service, as well as determining *when* it is necessary, and how multi-site fits into the picture.

The final section deals with finances and the importance of carefully determining what is possible within the budgets available. The authors are clear on the value of debt-free ministry, and the need to make changes that are affordable. Since responsible financial management is recognised as foundational to effective church ministry there are already plenty of secular and church-related resources available to assist in the principles and implementation of such management, and so there is little in this section that is new. However its contribution to the overall concepts provided in the book is important and within the context of 'more-with-less' helps to situate the information in a manner that builds on the earlier ideas.

If there is one aspect of the book that could be improved, it is that it assumes a certain expression of church and ministry structure. Although the authors have worked with many churches across North America, that diversity is not well represented, or perhaps their consultancy only appeals to a conservative, conventional church expression. Despite that caveat, the principles outlined in the book are applicable to most ministries once the requisite contextualisation has been performed.

I recommend *The More-With-Less-Church* as a book that will both provide answers to some of the problems that face church leadership and stimulate creative ideas for future development.



**Hunter, J. D. (2010). *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon Newton  
Kindle edition

The title of this book is rather ironic since the author more or less concludes that Christians can't really change the world in the way we often aspire to. Attempts by Christians to change the world by political or cultural agitation that aims at some form of Christian domination or reclamation of the culture are doomed to failure. However, Hunter does not argue for a kind of neo-Anabaptist separatism either. Rather he calls for a "faithful presence" by which Christians can "change the world" in a more modest and localized way by simply living out the Christian ethic and influencing others towards God's shalom by grace-filled behaviour.

The conclusion is modest but the argument along the way is profoundly stimulating. Hunter begins by arguing against the commonly held view of those engaged in "culture wars" that by establishing a Christian worldview and influencing individual thought, believers can change the course of history, reclaim western culture, turn back the tide of secularism or otherwise establish some kind of fresh Christian hegemony in the post-Christian west. Hunter contends convincingly that this kind of agenda is rooted in a false concept of culture and overstates the power of individual believers who are overwhelmingly not part of the cultural elite that drives the current western culture in its current postmodernist direction. Even if we experienced massive revival in our society, even if half the population became "born again" Christians, even if large numbers of Christians were elected to high office, the effect would be short-lived and superficial since the "principalities and powers" would remain substantially unaffected.

Hunter then surveys selected periods of history when Christians did substantially influence the direction of culture (such as the Reformation) and offers a more "hard-nosed" analysis of Christian success rooted in the power of elite forces and not just the power of truth. For example, Luther was successful in resisting the powers of Catholicism in his day because of new technology (the printing press) and his alliance with the German princes against the Hapsburgs, an alliance that to some extent compromised his theology. Hunter is sympathetic but realistic. The Reformation had unwanted and unanticipated "side effects" that actually weakened Christian society.

The next stage of Hunter's argument engages with the concept of power and the way that politics operates. He analyses and criticizes the three leading forms of Christian engagement (or disengagement) with modern culture in the USA; at least some of the argument applies to any western country, including Australia. According to Hunter, Christians have approached the broader culture in one of three main ways:

1. Resistance (the Christian Right), focusing on re-establishing a righteous social order.
2. Accommodation (the Christian Left), focusing on egalitarianism and social justice.
3. Separatism or disengagement (the Neo-Anabaptists), focusing on a pure church that displays an alternative social order.

Hunter finds each of these approaches deficient and infected (positively or negatively) by Constantinianism that is, by embracing or resisting the idea that Christians should dominate society. They are also fatally flawed in their resentment

towards the “powers that be” and their subsequent lack of grace towards those that disagree with their viewpoint. Too often, all three approaches (especially the first two) end up justifying the means (politics) by the ends (a Christianized society or a pure church). Moreover, all three are not able to resolve the issues thrown up by “difference” (that is, pluralism) and “dissolution” (that is, postmodernism, or that aspect of it that challenges the ability of language to represent reality successfully).

This leads Hunter to propose his idea of “faithful presence.” I won’t do this justice in a few lines, but basically, he wants us to disavow any idea of establishing a Christian society this side of the eschaton and instead concentrate on doing good and changing the world by the use of our influence in the spheres of life we find ourselves in. By this, he means making the world a better place for everyone rather than making everyone into Christians. He interprets the “Great Commission” more in terms of introducing faith, hope and love into a fallen world than in terms of converting people to Christianity. The examples he gives towards the end of the book are small scale: a checkout woman who shows love and grace to customers and becomes a light to many, a business that treats its customers and employees justly as persons made in God’s image, etc.

I am not sure I “buy” the whole argument but I found it very challenging and stimulating. The realism of Hunter’s analysis is refreshing. I found myself often thinking about how Christians have not always used political and cultural power well: the English Commonwealth and Calvin’s Geneva spring to mind. On the other hand, now that we have lost power, now that most people in (say) Australia no longer call themselves (nominal) Christians, I’m not sure things are better. Hunter basically challenges us to accept that western society was never really Christian and never will be. I want to say, “Yes, but ...”

However, this discussion must be had. If the church embraces Hunter’s thinking, the influence of the church may even exceed his expectations. This is where his argument challenges me as a pastor. Am I spending my “social capital” wisely? Am I wasting my energies, and those of my flock, in encouraging campaigns for social justice or against social evils, rather than positively demonstrating the kingdom of God by our faithful obedience to Christ in our individual locations and our context as a local church? Much to think about here.

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**Male, D. (2013). *Pioneering Leadership: Disturbing the Status Quo?* Grove Leadership Booklet S14. Ridley Hall, Cambridge: Grove Books.**

Reviewed by Dr Darren Cronshaw

With churches on the decline in much of the Western world and theological education often focused on pastoral aspects of leadership, there is a huge need for recruiting, training and resourcing pioneering leadership. We need new models of church and also fresh approaches to leadership development, especially of pioneers who can respond to the Spirit’s initiative in a context and help create something that opens up new horizons for the church (drawing on Male’s definition, p. 14).

Dave Male planted the Net Church in Huddersfield, an early Anglican fresh expression of church. He currently resources pioneers – lay and ordained – from the Centre for Pioneering Leadership in Cambridge. His 28-page resource booklet in the

Grove Leadership series introduces biblical, strategic and training and support implications for any church, college or system that wants to give priority to this area.

The term 'pioneer' has some unfortunate colonial implications of lone explorers who may have lacked cultural respect, or today might be suggestive of pragmatic extroverts or mavericks. However, Male reframes the term in helpful directions.

Firstly, there are strong biblical roots in reference to Jesus on whose power our pioneering rests (e.g., Heb. 2:10; 12:2). His example is to innovatively cross all sorts of boundaries to be good news to people (e.g., Mk. 1:40-45; 2:13-17; 5:25-43). Yet he also urges reconnecting with a deeper understanding of tradition (e.g., Mk. 2:23-27; 3:1-16). One strength of the booklet is its fresh invitation to re-engage and indwell our biblical story. Male quotes Henri Matisse's observation, "[t]o look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage." Pioneering leadership does not simply invent new and novel approaches and ignore tradition but seeks to get to the heart of Christian tradition. We need to be like experts who improvise in music or art, and thus need to understand foundations of musical or artistic forms in order to play with new and vivid alternatives. Male refers to learning "classical" forms first, but my musical friend Beth Barnett suggests that is not the best word, since lots of great jazz musicians don't know 'classical' at all, but deeply know the foundations of musical forms, and that helps remind us we don't have to "conform first, then earn the right to extemporize" but that there are even lots of different ways to learn the foundations, other than 'classically'. But this underlines Male's argument to invite people to re-engage their tradition and rediscover the heart of our history, not to default to a status quo position but to use that as a base for a radical and changed future (pp. 8-9, 15, 20).

Secondly, the writer makes the point that not everyone is a pioneering leader, but there are likely more in our churches than we presently recognise, and there are different sorts of pioneers. With George Lings, he suggests it is helpful to classify ourselves and those we train and support in four different categories, the first two of which we can especially encourage to pioneer, and the second two we can encourage to support others who pioneer:

- Pioneer-starters, great at starting new things and then moving on.
- Pioneer-sustainers, who can start a group from scratch and nurture it to maturity.
- Sustainer-pioneers, who are more nurturing pastoral types but want to champion parallel pioneering initiatives.
- Sustainer-developers whose primary gifting is nurture but who can still grow in helping a church with a mission.

The Church (and individual congregations) needs leaders who are at different points on this spectrum. But those who are pioneering, Male explains, tend to love starting things, being on the edge, taking risks, fostering community, looking outward, and asking questions. They also know when to stay or go, when to bring order or chaos, and how to think up creative alternatives. Those who recognise and train leaders will do well to use Male's lists as evaluative/diagnostic grids.

Male biblically grounds the pioneering leader's role in the function of Apostles, Prophets, and/or Evangelists (drawing on Ephesians 4), but also in the risk-taking and groundbreaking work of entrepreneurs. The booklet also explores how to value, empower and invest in pioneering leadership, and discusses key issues of managing expectations, measuring success (beyond just counting attendance), implementing

succession planning and sustainability, managing isolation, stimulating teamwork, making tough decisions and avoiding domestication.

This last point is a central learning point for aspiring pioneers, and those training and supporting them. As Male pleads, we do not want to bury pioneers in organisational burdens or pastorally focused Position Descriptions, nor domesticate them with a tame college and church environment and set of experiences:

It is important to consider how we keep pioneering leaders dangerous! Our church systems tend to domesticate such leaders, wanting them to fit in and not to rock the boat. But I believe our present critical time requires more, not fewer, dangerous leaders who are prepared to work in different and exciting ways. ... not get sucked into the vortex of meetings, rotas, committees and boards (p. 22).

*Pioneering Leadership: Disturbing the Status Quo?* is a concise but important briefing paper for pioneering leaders and those who want to produce more of them in healthy yet still dangerous directions. It draws mainly on the UK context but has potential to spark creative rethinking in other mission contexts, not least of which the mission of the church in other Western contexts.

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**McGonigal, K. (2013). *The willpower instinct: how self-control works, why it matters, and what you can do to get more of it*. New York, NY: Penguin.**

Reviewed by Dr Nigel Pegram

This is one of those rare books, which combine quality research with a practical and engaging writing style. McGonigal has written this book arising out of her experience both as an academic at Stanford University and through teaching average people how to improve their own willpower through her course “The Science of Willpower”.

The book follows the ten-week format of the course, and like the course, each chapter contains both relevant theory and practical ideas and exercises, which help the reader, apply the information and skills discussed. You can read this book for the valuable information contained therein; however, the best use of the book is to use it as a tool to develop skills. The author recommends reading a chapter per week and using the time in between to test and practice the skills discussed drawing on the helpful exercises contained within, and at the end of, each chapter.

The book progresses in a clear and logical fashion, beginning by clarifying what willpower is and then moving on to cover some of the puzzling and paradoxical expressions of human behaviour which can be observed in ourselves and others. Some of the topics she discusses include why people who champion moral causes frequently fall afoul of the very wrongs they decry (Chapter 4, “License to Sin”), and why we so easily mistake wanting for happiness and its links with addictive behaviours (Chapter 5, “The Brain’s Big Lie”).

Because the book has such a logical progression, the greatest benefit will be gained by a progressive reading of the whole. Many chapters build on the principles and information discussed earlier. It will be less beneficial to those who simply want to dive in and make a quick grab for relevant information.

Some may object to her passing remarks about evolutionary biology. Regardless of one's position on that topic, the principles and practices contained inside are based on solid research. For those who wish to delve deeper into the areas discussed, McGonigal provides a very useful set of notes on each chapter, the majority of which refers to primary research. One could profitably use the book as a helpful introduction, before pursuing wider reading in specific areas of interest.

More than anything this book is a practical discussion of a topic important to ministers and members of churches. It will clarify some of the reasons why people behave the way they do and provide ways in which helpful behaviours and attitudes can be enhanced and unhelpful ones discarded so each may live more fulfilling and more productive lives.

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**McKnight, J., & Block, P. (2012). *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.**

Review by Dr Darren Cronshaw

What kind of world do we want to leave for our grandchildren? What kind of neighbourhoods do we want to foster for our children to grow up in? These sorts of questions encourage us to dream and act for a better world. A temptation, however, is to leave planning for better communities to others – such as government, institutions or “community development experts.” *The Abundant Community* puts the responsibility for engaged citizenship back into the hands of ordinary people.

The writers bring decades of community development and organizational leadership experience to their writing. John McKnight is a community organizer and recognised as the leading architect of Assets Based Community Development, which he wrote about in *Building Communities from the Inside Out*. Peter Block is an early expert in organization development who now focuses on fostering local civic engagement. They describe their working and writing partnership together as seeking to explore how communities can be “villages” that band together to raise their children.

The clearest and most refreshing word of the book was “enough”. It showed me new ways of understanding and using the word. Firstly, applied to goods and services, “enough” invites satisfaction and contentment with what we have (rather than having to buy more). The book offers an excellent historical critique of the development and promotion of consumer society. Basically, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American industry shifted from meeting basic needs to creating new “needs”, and the burgeoning advertising sphere has been marketing “dissatisfaction” ever since in order to sell the latest products and experiences.

Secondly, and core to the underlying principles of community development, “enough” urges confidence that we have sufficient resources in our families and neighbourhoods to create a better world (rather than having to rely on outside experts or institutions). Rather than something to be obtained by purchasing more things or paying for services from professionals, McKnight and Block argue that the “good life” is obtainable as we collaborate for abundant communities. A local initiative from our families and neighbourhoods is the best way, they argue, to foster neighbourhood necessities which they discuss as community health, neighbourhood safety, environmental conservation, resilient economy, local food production, care for the

vulnerable, and “village” life to raise our children. With stories and principles, they develop how “when we join together with our neighbours, we are the architects of the future that we want to love within” (p. xiv).

Furthermore, I especially appreciated two concepts from the book relevant for my ministry. Firstly, the authors unpack lessons from early pioneers. Unfortunately, in a postcolonial context, the word reminds us of injustice and mistreatment towards indigenous people. McKnight and Block focus on positive lessons, though – about how pioneers created a community for themselves and fostered village life with the gifts and resources they had. Pioneers associated and banded together for the common good, yet also showed hospitality to newcomers – welcoming their knowledge and capacities. This is a story worth reflecting on for “pioneers” fostering community development and social entrepreneurship in postmodern (and postcolonial) times. Foundationally, pioneering or any community development involves the giving of gifts, fostering association and showing compassion with hospitality. Our neighbourhoods desperately need more of this kind of leadership – or to change to other metaphors – this kind of jazz music or potluck style community.

Secondly, McKnight and Block get practical in outlining what it takes to bring people together and foster their gift giving, association and hospitality. Key elements include time, silence and storytelling. I especially appreciated their affirmation of the power of stories:

Inviting stories are the single biggest community-building thing that we can do, especially when the stories we tell are stories of our capacities, what worked out. Since stories tell us what is important, speaking of our capacities establishes them as the foundation upon which we can build a future. The stories about our gifts, about how our kindness, our generosity, our trust, our forgiveness define us and give our life meaning – this is where an authentic sense of identity comes from, not from what we buy (p. 96).

This reminded me of the central importance of inviting people – in local church gatherings and training courses – to share and reflect on one another’s stories as citizens.

*The Abundant Community* offers a high view of the potential of grassroots activism, community, and neighbours. It stresses important principles of citizenship rather than consumerism, and empowerment of neighbours rather than institutional reliance. It is an excellent primer for anyone interested in bringing people together to collaborate for the greater good, and so deserves a values place on reading lists for community development or Christian ministry students and practitioners.

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**Ralph, K. (2015). *Your Final Choice: Hastening your death when terminally ill - eight questions to ask yourself*. Australia: Morning Star Publishing.**

Reviewed by Ps Astrid Staley

As a Christian educator committed to equipping pastoral caregivers and the Christian community at large in how to recognize, successfully intervene, and prevent those who have lost hope and are overcome by life's challenges from taking their life, I found this book by Kenneth Ralph goes against every aim in suicide prevention. The author acknowledges this and draws a sharp distinction between the suicidal person

and a person who has arrived at the end of their life's journey, suffering a terminal illness, accompanied by intolerable pain. In contrast with a person who has died by suicide, but who had been seemingly healthy, he sees no similarity with a person who is given the 'power of choice' to end their life (euthanistic suicide) "by a 'good' death when already dying from a 'bad' one," choosing one death to avoid a worse one (p. 11). At the outset, he wisely recommends that anyone struggling with 'morbid melancholy' or a sense of 'hopelessness' due to personal circumstance to avoid wading through the book's content. This recommendation I would also endorse given its saturated discussion on death and dying.

The author's operating principle is that a person facing a terminal illness should be empowered to choose for themselves both the 'timing' and 'manner' of their death. This view is somewhat dissonant to his original stance that such a choice is 'morally evil,' one likely to resonate with many Christians. After many hours spent with people experiencing 'un-relievable suffering', his experiences called into question his initial approach to this difficult issue. Additionally, discovering other voices within the Christian community who believed that such a choice was to the dying person "reasonable, liberating and altruistic" (p. 12) helped solidify this position.

In producing this 'pastoral/ethical' publication, Ralph poses eight questions for the reader now experiencing a terminal illness, or perhaps for the reader who might one day face the same, to contemplate. He does not seek to suggest what choice is best for the individual per se – he believes what is 'right' for one may not be for another – yet he clearly wishes to sway the reader towards greater acceptance of the right of those who are terminally ill to end their life on their own terms. Stories of people who made the choice of when and how to die are weaved throughout, including recognizable public figures like Freud, Katherine Hepburn, and Jackie Kennedy. Statistics from a 1996 poll affirming support of voluntary euthanasia from within mainstream denominations further serve to bolster this aim. Despite the lack of more current statistics, the outcome of the poll is insightful.

A level of theological wrestling in the mind of the reader is assured as one is catapulted headfirst into the sphere of morality, confronted with polarizing terms such as 'assisted suicide,' 'medically assisted suicide,' 'voluntary euthanasia,' and options such as refusal of treatment, advance health care directives, refusal of fluids, and making private arrangements with a doctor.

The author explores various theological beliefs about humans and their relationship to God. Perspectives that will undoubtedly underpin decisions to endure suffering until the last breath, or to hasten death, are whether God is the 'giver of life' and alone has the prerogative to end life, or whether humans are 'free responsible partners' possessing the utter right to 'self-determination,' or indeed whether life is a 'gift' or on 'loan' from God. In presenting these, theological perspectives that do not put 'self' in the driver's seat of life's choices are interspersed with accounts of those who turned from such a view and discussion of possible flaws of such beliefs; all in keeping with the mantra, "my body, my death, my choice" (p. 41).

Another vital question the author invites the reader to consider is what loss of human qualities because of terminal illness would cause them to consider death as a preferred option. The discussion centers on 'intrinsic' versus 'extrinsic' value. Life viewed as having intrinsic value has value, not because of its usefulness to society, but because it is just that – life. On the other hand, the extrinsic value is predicated upon its

usefulness to self and others. One is more resistant to hastening death, whereas the other is more open to it.

A minor criticism might be offered as to the depiction of the violent means chosen by a person who died by suicide as a way of contrasting 'violent' suicides and "non-violent, self-respecting suicides which contain the component of self-preservation" (p. 73). The language is unnecessarily graphic, and its inclusion unhelpful, seemingly included for its shock value. The point the author is trying to make is achieved, and more appropriately, by merely highlighting the place where the person ended their life and the effect this would have on the loved one who discovers their body. Suicide Prevention Australia discourages graphic details in the re-telling of suicide deaths. Additionally, the author refers to a person who has died by suicide as having 'committed' suicide. This terminology does not reflect the current focused measures by educators in suicide prevention to eliminate language that historically has been stigmatizing when discussing suicide. Perhaps future revisions might address these concerns.

Undoubtedly, people facing death and suffering a terminal illness have silently pondered the many questions the author has posed. An integral part of ministry as pastoral caregivers is sitting with people who are bearing up under extreme suffering with death as a sure prognosis. Providing a safe environment for someone in such a situation to wrestle through some of the theological and moral challenges associated with hastening death are vital. A minister's familiarity with the options and implications of each will certainly assist in opening the way for candid discussions.

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**Searcy, N. (2013). *The Renegade Pastor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.**

Reviewed by Ps Jeremy Weetman

There inevitably comes a time in every pastor's life when they ask themselves the question, "Why am I doing this?" The question is usually posed at times of great stress or difficulty in their ministry, their personal life, their health, or one of those Monday mornings when Sunday was not so great. Nelson Searcy's book provides a challenge to rise above these difficulties and the spiral into mediocrity by becoming 'renegade pastors' and choosing meaning over mediocrity.

This is a very helpful and practical book built on Searcy's experience in ministry and as a church consultant. Each of the chapters suggests a commitment that should be made to maintain healthy boundaries and successfully fulfil God's call on your life and that of your church. He includes testimonies and personal stories that add life to the book and situates his strategies very clearly in ministry life. The book will be of benefit to many in church life and ministry.

However, there is little in the book that is original and has not been said many times before in other church leadership material, or business management and leadership resources. The information is good, just not new. Searcy also connects what he suggests to his other books, website and network, which may be a good or bad thing depending on your point of view.

There are three particularly helpful strategies within the book. The third chapter contains a section on conflict resolution, an important topic, and one that must be handled well in ministry. Searcy's approach is, like the rest of the book, practical, clear



and simple. He advocates acting early, planning your approach, and not making assumptions but rather 'assess[ing] the attitude' (p. 73). He follows this with the advice to find a 'lightning rod', a friend, or group of friends who can serve as a sounding board and help to ground criticism and negative energy. Although noting that the lightning rod should be objective, Searcy does not explicitly state this is to provide insight into whether the criticism might have some validity, but the need for an objective, supportive person or group where a pastor can unload is critical.

The third strategy of note is the practice of Sabbath. From a personal reflection on his own lack in this area, he develops his argument in favour of Sabbath not only for personal emotional and relational health but also for the future benefit of ministry. Searcy presents four elements that make up Sabbath: rest, reflection, recreation, and 'profection' – thinking about the future (pp. 99-100). Though he addresses the resistance to Sabbath in the common argument of, "I don't have time for Sabbath" to a certain degree, perhaps he could have given some consideration to the concept of 'busyness' as a badge of honour in the cultural context of our Western lifestyles.

In summary, though *The Renegade Pastor* largely reiterates ideas and practices already common in ministry and business, it is nevertheless a valuable resource for all levels of church leadership seeking to improve their ministry capacity, and in particular new ministers beginning their vocational life.

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**Simpson, R. with Brent Lyons-Lee. (2016). *St Aidan's Way of Mission: Celtic Insights for a Post-Christian World*. Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship.**

Reviewed by Dr Darren Cronshaw

Aidan is an inspiring saint whose Irish mission to the English is an instructive model for mission in the post-Christendom Western world today, suggest Ray Simpson with Brent Lyons-Lee.

Ray Simpson is the founding Guardian and chief liturgist of the International New Monastic Community of Aidan and Hilda and author of over thirty books on spirituality and mission. Brent Lyon-Lee is Mission Catalyst for Community Engagement with the Baptist Union of Victoria and a social justice activist. This is his third book he has co-written with Ray Simpson connecting Celtic insights with spirituality that can be at home in Australia.

The story began when Aidan was posted to the Iona monastery. When a previous mission effort to Northumbria failed, Aidan was sent from Iona to Northumbria in 635. He learned English, built trust with King Oswald and his court, and walked around the region seeking to incarnate the gospel and create indigenous "colonies of heaven."

I loved the invitation of the book to reflect on Aidan's example of the Christian life as a pilgrimage, not a possession. Irish pilgrims or *peregrine* allowed God's Spirit to blow them where it wished and let mission take as long as it needed. As reflected in vows of the Community of Aidan and Hilda, it is about setting sail and letting the "Wild Goose" or untameable Spirit of God lead into wild or windy places, and then make them places of welcome and wonder. To find your calling, Simpson often says, "Let your feet follow your heart until you find your place of resurrection" (p. 29). The place of resurrection is about not only where you will literally die, but also where you can experience shalom and harmony between yourself and your place and neighbours (and

so where you may as well stay until you die). It is where “fruit comes as a gift because we are the right person in the right place at the right time. Creativity flows. Connections take place. Synchronicity occurs. Jesus is revealed” (p. 29). That is sufficient vision to invite us to let go of what we hold (and what holds us) and step out on a Spirit-led journey, and keep walking till we find a place where the bells ring for us.

The second inspiring lesson I got from this book is that, rather than viewing the church as institutional and attractional, do-it-yourself or even focused on mission only, Aidan’s vision of church was as “God-shaped hub communities that have a heart for God, others and society” (p. 87). Starting in Lindisfarne, Aidan planted a network of monastic communities that included schools, libraries and guest quarters, and space for productive farming as well as celebratory feasting. Simpson suggests today’s global village still needs churches as “villages of God”:

- A 24-hour society calls for seven-days-a-week faith communities.
- A café society calls for churches that are eating-places.
- A travelling society calls for churches that provide accommodation.
- A stressed society calls for churches that nurture retreats and meditation.
- A multi-choice society calls for churches that have a choice of styles and facilities.
- A fragmented society calls for holistic models and whole-life discipling.
- An eco-threatened society calls for more locally sustainable communities that have roots in the soil (p. 74).

This is a model of church functioning in ways that are responsive to one’s adopted city and seeking to foster shalom.

Aidan also celebrated the image and gifts of God in women as well as men. Aidan prioritised practices and rhythms, and I appreciated the writer’s urging to identify practices worth commending to people in my community. Moreover, Aidan had a grounded vision of an earthy faith that cares for Creation. The book is practical about how to do this, but also beautifully weaves together Celtic and Australian indigenous stories.

Finally, Simpson and Lyons-Lee stressed the importance that Aidan taught of having soul friends who help us cultivate balanced and prayerful living and a lifelong love for learning wisdom. Aidan’s spirituality and teaching were not focused only on book learning but also on cultivating a deep devotion, as this prayer urged:

Divine Mentor,  
Teach us the habits of holy learning,  
To know your ways  
To explore your world  
To learn from experience  
To understand people  
To manage time and talents  
To draw on wellsprings of wisdom  
Until we become a people of saints and scholars (p. 47).

The Church in the West does not need another one-size-fits-all off-the-shelf program. However, we do need stories of saints who have walked journeys of courageous faith and adventurous mission – not to imitate closely but to suggest principles and ways of engaging our neighbourhoods in fresh and humble ways. *St*

*Aidan's Way of Mission* is a delightful read, weaving together the story of this inspiring saint and implications for contemporary ministry.

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**Stewart, J. W. (2015). *Envisioning the Congregation, Practicing the Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.**

Reviewed by Dr Jon Newton

This new book describes itself as “a guide for pastors and lay leaders.” It is addressed particularly to leaders of “mainline” Protestant churches in the USA, the section of the Christian church most in decline in terms of numerical size and influence. Stewart wants to map out a pathway to growth and impact for such churches. Much of what he says is arguably relevant to countries like Australia as well.

After explaining his strategy in the book, Stewart begins with an analysis of the problem. Why is Protestant Christianity in decline? The answer is that it is out of “sync” with the values of contemporary American (even western) culture, or rather that the prevailing culture has successfully hijacked the church. “Here is the main plot: intrusive, potent cultural values of contemporary America have skewed Christianity’s classical beliefs and deconstructed the Church’s wisest and proven faith-forming practices.” (p. 11). In what may be the best chapter in the book, Stewart identifies six “socio-cultural assumptions” that undermine the faith, namely, the quest for *homogeneity*, the commitment to *individualism*, the seduction of *consumerism*, the reality of religious *pluralism*, the thirst for *spirituality*, and the dominance of *deism* (pp. 13-14).

After examining the essential features of the Christian gospel (Chapter 3), Stewart spends the rest of the book defining and arguing for the adoption of core Christian practices such as fellowship, hospitality, discipleship, witness, serving and worship. The idea seems to be that the church must recover its vision of being the church as in the New Testament (with special attention to the post-Pentecostal passage Acts 2:40-47). Only then can it hope to recover its life, its power, and its effectiveness in an increasingly hostile culture. Each chapter offers a survey of New Testament teaching on the practice under examination and analyses the essential features of that practice as it relates to today’s situation, matching each to one of the problem areas identified in Chapter 2. It looks for contemporary examples of this practice being outworked in these essentials in American Protestant churches, offering these as models for others to follow. There are many resources identified for readers to follow up, making this a good resource book.

In a sense, there is nothing radically new in this book. Stewart also does not offer any new facts or research, choosing rather to build on the research of others, which he does rather well, bringing the research of Christian denominations, groups like Barna Research and sociologists like Robert Wuthnow and others to the table in a digestible form. Much of the discussion is too wide-ranging to challenge the reader with radical insights. Some of the suggestions are bordering on trivial, such as the discussion on the use of social media (pp. 87–88). However, the argument of the book has power in its consistent emphasis on the church recovering its authentic self.

Here and there, there are jewels of insights that kept me reading, such as the testimonies of key Christian thinkers over the centuries (such as Jürgen Moltmann) in Chapter 3. For leaders of the kinds of churches Stewart is targeting, and for many other churches as well, this book would be a wise investment.