

Book Reviews

Before you Hire a Youth Pastor: A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding the Right Fit. By Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Ranking. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2011. 124 pp. \$7.99.

The search for a youth pastor can be a tedious one. While many churches have a plan in place for replacing their departing youth pastor, often times, those plans are executed ineffectively, and can even lead to the wrong hire. Thankfully, youth ministry experts Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Rankin have put together a book to prevent those unfortunate situations. In *Before You Hire a Youth Pastor*, the authors put forth extremely practical tools and advice for moving the pastoral search process forward in a way that honors God, empowers laypeople, and guides a church toward the right youth pastor hire.

DeVries and Dunn-Rankin consider all aspects of the youth pastor search process, such as selecting the correct members for a search committee, settling on a theological vision for youth ministry, establishing a search timeline, analyzing resumes, interviewing candidates, asking the proper questions, and everything in between. They provide examples of searches that have gone both well and poorly and provide practical advice that will help the desperate youth pastor search committee.

The authors agree that searching for a youth pastor can be a difficult venture, and their hope is that they can enable churches to find the right youth pastor in a manner that is efficient, effective, and ends with the proper person(s) in ministry leadership. Helpfully, the authors make this process step-by-step (38 steps to be exact), and leave no stone unturned. They include numerous appendices of sample job descriptions for both full-time and part-time staff, a candidate tracking sheet, a sample rejection letter, guidelines for interviews, and many others. These appendices comprise almost half of the book, and will no doubt save search committees time and stress. While it may appear that DeVries and Dunn-Rankin advocate a “cookie-cutter” approach to the search process, they understand that not all churches are in the same place theologically, financially, or administratively. They are sensitive to the ministry needs of all churches, and go to great lengths to help committees move the search process along smoothly.

As leaders of Youth Ministry Architects, DeVries and Dunn-Rankin have several years of combined experience in the field of youth ministry. They readily understand the needs of churches and youth pastors alike. DeVries has authored a number of similar works, such as *Family-Based Youth Ministry* and *Sustainable Youth*

Ministry that come alongside youth ministers in the journey to effective youth ministry practices. The present text is no different, and is an extraordinarily practical, punchy, and quick read. The authors refrain from technical jargon, giving the book an exceptionally readable quality. While its intended audience is lay people who need guidance on moving through the search process, potential youth pastors will benefit from understanding the thought process of those on the other side of the search. It will certainly help search committees avoid the pitfalls that generally plague the search process. I strongly recommend that every church, even those with thriving youth pastors, add this book to their collection.

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The Indispensable Youth Pastor: Land, Love, and Lock In Your Youth Ministry Dream Job. By Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Rankin. Loveland, CO: Group, 2011. 173 pp. \$15.99.

There is no lacuna of books written about the call to ministry, but books on the call to youth ministry are few and far between. Even more rare are books that discuss the implications of that call to youth ministry; specific-

ly, how to find a ministry position and flourish in one's work. The *Indispensable Youth Pastor* is one that fills this gap and more. Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Rankin take the potential youth pastor on a journey from discerning the call to youth ministry, to finding the perfect ministry position, to becoming an indispensable youth pastor.

In the beginning of their book, the authors seek to help service-minded people discern a call to full-time vocational youth ministry. From there, the authors spend considerable time on the process of finding a youth ministry position. DeVries and Dunn-Rankin offer priceless advice about this process: the need for a sturdy résumé, securing good references, nailing interviews, and dealing with search committees. Next, the authors deal with "locking in" your ministry position. Their goal in this section is to "help you keep your job for as long as you and God had in mind were called" (57) and to help a youth pastor become "indispensable." Again, DeVries and Dunn-Rankin offer wisdom on issues, such as listening to the needs of youth and the congregation as a whole, understanding healthy growth, exceeding expectations, dealing with parents, the art of "woo," and much more. Finally, the authors explain how to maintain ministry enthusiasm after many years of youth ministry service.

The book's final pages include two appendices related to the youth ministry search process.

The present text serves as a companion text to *Before You Hire a Youth Pastor* (Group, 2011), which explores the youth pastor search process from the perspective of a church committee. The two should be read together in order to bring a fully-orbed picture to the process of matching the right personnel with the right ministry position.

The Indispensable Youth Pastor covers a lot of ground with regards to life in youth ministry, such as identifying the call to youth ministry, networking, being on the same page as the senior pastor, and much more. While the authors do not depend on scholarly sources or data to strengthen their advice, their leadership in Youth Ministry Architects enables them to speak with quite a bit of authority in matters related to seeking youth ministry positions and thriving in youth ministry. They offer plenty of anecdotes from their own time in youth ministry, as well as stories from those with whom they have interacted over the years. With many years of combined youth ministry experience and working with churches, DeVries and Dunn-Rankin have authored a text that belongs on the shelf of every youth minister, from serious volunteer youth workers to veteran youth pastors.

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Croft, Brian and Cara. *The Pastor's Family: Shepherding Your Family through the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 176 pp. \$16.99.

Calvin Miller wrote a book that spoke to the plight of shepherding among evangelicals: its title, "O Shepherd Where Art Thou?" The Crofts have, in large measure, written the same for the pastor's family. Shepherding has fallen on hard times—both in the church and in the home. Pastors are shepherds; husbands are shepherds; fathers are shepherds. Pastors with families must be shepherds—thrice over. The church needs books like this; ministerial families pray for books like this.

A number of aspects of this book require praise. First, the correct overarching paradigm for ministry, both to the flock and the family, has been upheld, namely, shepherding. A pastor is fundamentally a shepherd. Against the American proclivity to elevate preaching as the defining duty of a pastor, Croft has rightly held both public and private ministry under the umbrella of shepherding (cf. Acts 20:20 & 20:28). Any pastor discharging less is a hire-

ling (John 10:11-15).

Secondly, Croft has rightly placed the problem within the soul (45, 49). A pastor's problem is not ultimately the demands external to him. "In the heart of every pastor is an innate wiring, a tendency to fulfill his desires and meet the demands of life in broken, selfish, and sinful ways" (43). It is only that which comes out of the heart that defiles a person (Mark 7:20-23). Even sinful people (or circumstantial suffering) can at best only squeeze out what was already within. Croft refuses to diminish the death of Jesus for anything less than sin (see below). Therefore, he points pastors to the only solution, namely repentance (52). Pastors, like all believers, need a redeemer, not a therapeutic healer (cf. Titus 2:14).

Thirdly, the sections urging pastors to pastor their children are helpful and practical. For example, Croft rightly holds children accountable for their response, while admonishing pastors to not exasperate them (138-39) and then gives five concrete ways to prevent parenting by absentia (141ff.).

One facet of the work remains enigmatic, however—how to respond to Cara's running commentary. At times, her insertions were insightful, while at others awkward. Assuming the Crofts complementarians, Cara would be writing to the spouses of pastors in a book that is principally

addressed to the pastors. Furthermore, in light of Cara's preference for works of fiction rather than systematic (85), one wonders how to respond to her practical theology. Finally, the Appendix delineating Cara's depression seemed out of place in a book about pastoral ministry.

Two other limitations also bear mentioning. First, Brian rightly decries sinful desires while failing to eliminate "felt needs" theology (cf. 55). He laments pastors who, "Rather than...believing that God will meet his needs, he tries to meet his own needs for acceptance, significance, approval, and friendship" (45, cf. 74). To permit a "needs mentality" is to ensure slavery—to the very problem Croft bemoans. "Needs' or 'rights' lead irresistibly into fear of man. We've seen that whatever you think you need, you come to fear" (Ed Welch, *When People Are Big and God is Small*, 87).

Moreover, one should not go to God to get those inordinate desires unmet by others. Martha tried the same and was rebuffed by Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). Welch again, helps here:

She knew that the answer was not to turn to Christ to meet her felt need. That would have made Jesus her personal talisman or idol. Instead, her answer was to put to death her selfish desires and to learn to fear God alone. As a result, her question began to change. It was no longer "Where can I find my worth?" but "Why am I so concerned about myself?" It was not "How can God fill my needs?"

but "How can I see Christ as so glorious that I forget about my perceived needs?" (Welch, 233)

Clarity is desperately needed when countering the wisdom of the world that has crept into the church.

Secondly, real help for the problems astutely identified lies within reach—but untapped. The pitfalls uncovered could be better avoided through a paradigm of ministry more collegial than hierarchical. A hierarchy allows "the counsel of my associate pastor" to be ignored by the senior pastor (140). Associates do not hold seniors accountable. An equal, however, cannot be avoided. If all pastors were generalists, discharging all duties equally (including preaching), then all would be humbled by the calling, not just "senior pastors" (cf. 60) and each pastor could spend time with the church, counseling etc. (79-80) and with family during the worship service (166)—and perhaps even some of the temptations like the "great fear and anxiety" of becoming a senior pastor's wife, not experienced when merely an associate pastor's wife, could also be checked (cf. 155).

The church should demand all her pastors read and heed books like this. Books like these are vital—but more is needed. May the Croft's keep refining and reworking a thoroughly biblical pastoral ministry to glorify The Shep-

herd and Overseer of our souls.

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Harney, Kevin G. *Organic Outreach For Ordinary People: Sharing Good News Naturally*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009. 256 pp. \$14.99.

All Christians are called to be salt and light to a dark and dying world, yet many professing believers cringe at the thought of evangelizing. There is no doubt that evangelism is difficult, yet true followers of Christ understand that God has commanded us to evangelize the lost. For those who have been convicted to be obedient to the Word of God, pastor-author, Kevin Harney, has written this book to encourage us to reach out and share the good news of Jesus naturally. His focus is on ordinary people engaging in natural conversation and sharing God's love and grace (16). Harney has written a practical book to help us grow in our desire and ability to evangelize the lost.

Harney writes in a useful manner using a simple, yet effective outline. The book is divided into three parts. In part one (pre-evangelism), he builds a foundation based on having a heart for God. Because we are image bearers of Christ, our motivation for

reaching the broken and lost must be shaped by the love that God has for His people. In part two, Harney “investigates some of the different ways that we can be part of God’s amazing work of scattering and watering the seed of the gospel” (89). In this section he challenges us to reach out and connect with unbelievers regularly. Part three speaks of the ultimate work of salvation through the outreach of God’s people. The author leaves no misunderstanding—salvation is a work of God alone, in the heart of man. He reminds us that the credit is not ours, yet the Holy Spirit works in and through us to accomplish God’s plan of salvation.

This book contains a wealth of information, however, two points stand out. The first is prayer. For outreach to be effective, we must begin with a high view of God and have a total dependence upon Him, and we show this dependence by being prayerful people. Harney has beautifully described the image of prayer by announcing, “We unleash heavenly power when we pray for lost people. When God’s people pray, heaven shakes, strongholds are broken, and power is unleashed” (97, 99). The author leaves no doubt that to make a dramatic change and impact on our evangelistic outreach, the Holy Spirit will have to be intimately involved. We must be engaged in prayer on a consistent basis if we are to

be tools that God uses to bring people into His kingdom. Harney teaches us several ways to engage in prayer to experience afresh the grace of God. One method I immediately placed into my own prayer time was ‘Triple-Five Prayers’ (101).

The second point is interaction with the lost. Throughout the book, Harney presents questions to invite us into a deeper spiritual conversation with non-believers. Harney rightly offers warnings to Christians to periodically check their motives to ensure that they are (1) operating from a pure desire to be salt and light in the world, and (2) that they are influencing people with the truths of the gospel, and not allowing themselves to get sucked back into sinful living. The author offers many suggestions for providing a conduit so that unbelievers can come together naturally with followers of Christ and engage in the regular activities of life. Additionally, each chapter ends with a practical section of questions designed to challenge the reader in their own personal growth.

One weakness that I see in this book is that when Harney speaks of the gospel message he leads off with the good news of God’s love, rather than the person’s need to be poor in spirit and thirsting for righteousness because of the sin that separates him from God (Matt. 5:3-6; Isa. 59:2). To be fair, he never disregards these

truths; they always flow right behind God’s graciousness and love. However, I am under the conviction that nobody can fully understand the powerful grace that is the gift of God’s love unless they know exactly how bad their need for a Savior is. The gospel message includes, and is predicated on several factors, not just one. (1) A warning about sin and the consequences of sin (John 16:8; 2 Thess. 1:8-9). (2) God’s solution for sin—the good news of the gospel (Rom. 3:21-26; Eph. 2:1-9; 2 Cor. 5:21). (3) Finally, it includes the clear call to repent (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:1-5; Acts 17:29-31; Rom. 1:16). We are not interested in simply satisfying the outward desires of people’s lives. The full gospel message is one that has the power to transform lives from the inside out, and we should never neglect offering the full gospel.

This book was written for the person who is ready to thoughtfully and prayerfully step up his evangelism and be a beacon of God’s grace and love. The author concedes, “Evangelism is not about a magic formula. It is about the power of God and the faithfulness of His people, people like you and me. We scatter the seed, but He brings the growth” (149). If we desire a closer relationship with God, we have to get ourselves out of our comfort zones and engage in the world as salt and light. I highly recommend this book.

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James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken,
Effective Bible Teaching, 2nd Edition
Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012, 193pp.
\$21.99.

Would you classify much of the Bible teaching at your church as little more than “poor lay preaching?” If you were honest, how would you describe the teachers under whom your people sit week after week? Is their material full of biblical content, but dry, disjointed and unconnected to real life? Or, is their teaching illustrative and witty but touching upon the Scripture only long enough to glean only the smallest seeds of truth? Perhaps you are a pastor or lay-teacher who feels like you fit into one of these two categories. Whatever the case, whether you are a pastor hoping to cultivate a strong teaching ministry in your church, or a lay-teacher struggling to communicate the truths of God’s Word in a way that is both useful to students and faithful to the text, Wilhoit and Ryken’s *Effective Bible Teaching* has much to offer you.

The authors, James Wilhoit, professor of Christian Formation at Wheaton College, and Leland Ryken,

professor of English at the same institution, are convinced that poor Bible teaching can be remedied. “The premise of this book is that it is possible to diagnose with precision what goes well and what goes poorly in the classroom. It is also possible to prescribe a cure for every ailment” (14). The hope that one’s teaching can transition from dull and lifeless to stimulating and fruitful is a welcome encouragement for many teachers of the Bible, I’m sure.

Wilhoit and Ryken are persuaded, however, that in our attempts to correct instances of unfruitful teaching in our churches we have looked “too much at the teacher and not enough at the educational process and the content” (15). While not ignoring this “human component” completely—Chapter 4 is dedicated to discussing the traits of an excellent teacher—the authors concentrate their efforts on what is taught more than on the one who teaches it. Their aim is to help instructors craft textually grounded, theologically insightful, well-organized Bible studies that not only convey spiritually nourishing truth in a compelling manner, but also motivate students to think, study and learn on their own. Many good teachers may regularly accomplish the former, but only an excellent teacher will find consistent success in the latter. Indeed,

the notion that genuine learning is self-motivated learning is a principle that underlies the entire book.

We must never forget that all true education is self-education. No teacher can make students learn, a fact that is ignored in contemporary approaches to education that pamper students and ask teachers to shoulder the entire responsibility for education....Students need to be engaged, not infatuated, and that is why we emphasize learning-centered education. Our focus must be on fostering and promoting deep and significant student learning (31).

In order to promote this kind self-motivated learning, Wilhoit and Ryken find great value in facilitating Inductive Bible Studies where students are encouraged and expected to interact with, ask questions about, and formulate their own judgments about the biblical text at the guidance of the instructor. This approach to Bible teaching is distinguished from Directed Bible Studies. Although the various components of the teacher's preparation are the same under each approach, what happens in the classroom is notably different. "A directed study replaces group discovery with the leader's sharing of his or her insights into a passage. Inductive study is radically democratic. It gives every member a vote. Directed study lets the leader do more of the talking" (110).

Wilhoit and Ryken do not mean to imply, however, that inductive Bible studies are always advisable. Some groups are too large while others are too unfamiliar with the material to benefit from an inductive approach. In such cases, the teacher should implement a directed study method so that the students will be exposed to educated teaching rather than the collective ignorance of the other students.

Regardless of how you might assess the validity of the inductive method for conducting Bible studies or whether or not you believe it would work in your particular setting, the principles outlined by Wilhoit and Ryken will serve as reliable tools to help you adequately prepare and present faithful and stimulating Bible teaching. I shall mention a few.

Perhaps most important among the principles discussed by the authors is their exhortation to "come to grips with the text" (17). In order to avoid drifting into the comfortable territory of one's hobbyhorses or to keep from waxing eloquent on theological issues not related to a given passage, teachers must draw their lessons from the text itself. Yet, remaining tethered to the text is not enough. "To teach a passage effectively, a teacher must be able to communicate a sense of its unity" (59). In order to grasp a passage's unity, one must

identify its genre—is it narrative, exposition, poetry?—and locate the “big idea” of the passage. Accurately identifying the genre guards one from wrongly interpreting the passage. Discerning the main idea keeps the teacher from missing the conceptual forest for the exegetical trees. Both practices help “impose a unity” on the passage that will help the teacher and his students better understand the biblical text.

In fact, because Wilhoit and Ryken are convinced that proper interpretation depends upon one’s ability to classify the kind of literature they are studying, they discuss the matter of genre in multiple places throughout the book, dedicating two chapters to specific genres: narrative (Chapter 13) and poetry (Chapter 14). Even in the chapter devoted to helping the teacher recognize and convey the main idea of a passage (Chapter 6), Wilhoit and Ryken give several examples of what this looks like as the teacher comes in contact with the Bible’s various genre.

The authors also outline several indispensable principles for sound biblical interpretation (see Chapter 8). Among these is the reminder to “operate on the premise that the Bible is God’s revealed word, inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore without error” (92). Keeping this foundational premise in its rightful

place helps the teacher properly reverence Scripture as he works his interpretation of various texts.

A second principle a teacher must keep clear in his mind is that “the biblical canon...is an organic whole in which the parts fit together harmoniously” (93). Unfortunately, as it relates to the work of interpretation, the authors understand this principle chiefly in precautionary terms: “Accordingly, one should interpret individual passages in an awareness of what is said elsewhere in the Bible. In the case of difficult or obscure passages, the interpreter should give precedence to biblical passages where the doctrine is clear” (93). The canon acts as a set of guardrails to keep the teacher from driving into a doctrinal ditch as he handles tough passages.

There is more, however, that should be drawn from this principle; namely, that Scripture’s nature as an “organic” document implies that much theological and pastoral treasure can be quarried from understanding how various themes, doctrines and types unfold over the canon and find fulfillment and development as God’s plan of redemption is revealed in greater and greater detail. Although Wilhoit and Ryken mention the progressive nature of Scripture on the following page (94), they do so only to offer

a general reminder that teaching in the Old Testament is often clarified in the New.

The implication, then, is that, while incredibly helpful, Wilhoit and Ryken's book should not be the only book that Bible teachers read in their quest to grow in effectiveness. Books other than those that delineate the mechanics of biblical interpretation and the methods of teaching should find their way onto the teacher's reading list; works of biblical theology in particular. An effective teacher will not only be able to deal rightly with a given

passage, he will also be able to place that passage within the grand narrative of the biblical storyline and show his people how the truth of that particular text relates to Christ and unfolds (or has unfolded) over the canon. In short, an effective Bible teacher will be able to show his students how the whole Bible fits together with Christ at the center. And when students really see this, their desire to learn will be insatiable.

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