

BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to Theological Reflection: A Fresh Approach for Practical Ministry Courses and Theological Field Education

By Jim L. Wilson and Earl Waggoner
Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020, 192 pages, \$18.99

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The Israelites were tired, quarrelsome, and thirsty. Their leader, Moses, asked for God's help. God instructed Moses to take his staff and speak to a rock, from which God would cause water to pour out, displaying his power and quenching the people's thirst.

The water did indeed come gushing out. In one sense, Moses' ministry was effective. And yet, he disobeyed and displeased God in the process. Instead of speaking to the rock, he chastised the Israelites and then struck the rock. His actions resulted in his prohibition from leading the Israelites into the Promised Land.

"Ministry effectiveness, as important as it is, is not enough," write Wilson and Waggoner. Instead of going from action to action, they contend, ministers must *pause* for theological reflection: the process of "[bringing] together biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical data with the real-world practice of ministry" (17).

This action—reflection—process incorporates a "reflection loop" of "identify—align—explore" (42). During this reflection loop, a minister (1) examines the components of a ministry situation, including his or her beliefs, thoughts and feelings; (2) works to align these issues with God's truth, and then; (3) explores possibilities for future ministry responses. "With the reflection loop," write Wilson and Waggoner, "you intentionally close the gap between your understanding of God's truth and your behavior" (165).

In the biblical example of Moses and the Israelites at Meribah (Num. 20:1-13), Wilson and Waggoner wonder how Moses might have acted differently had he paused for reflection. Perhaps he would have recognized his own emotions. Perhaps he would have remembered God's faithfulness. And then, perhaps he would have responded in faith instead of from frustration. Similarly, the process of theological reflection shapes a minister, which then shapes his or her ministry practice.

In Section 1 of their book, the authors develop a case and a model for theological reflection. In Section 2, they present methods and tools for performing this reflection. These include 360-degree feedback, journaling, mentoring, case studies, and growth covenants, among others.

This *Guide* has much to commend it. Wilson and Waggoner provide a helpful summary of other models of theological reflection. They acknowledge the complex factors involved in real-life ministry, and the importance of identifying a minister's own beliefs, thoughts, and feelings, and how they influence ministry action.

At the same time, the authors sometimes talked in principle without giving concrete, detailed examples of what theological reflection looks like in practice, both in the classroom and in the field. In addition, while the authors state that "reflection changes the minister" (26), they do not explore this significant concept in any depth. Finally, it should be noted that the authors come from an evangelical Christian perspective, in which the written Scriptures are given primacy over the Holy Spirit, community discernment, or ecclesiastical tradition as the basis of theological reflection. Therefore, its relevance may be limited for readers from other Christian traditions.

All in all, however, Wilson and Waggoner's book is a worthy addition to the literature regarding theological reflection in the context of ministry practice.