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Book Review

Mission in the Way of Daniel: Empowering Believers to Live into God's Plan

By Edward Smither
William Carey Publishing, 2022
122 pages
US\$9.99

Reviewed by Rev. Dr. H. L. "Scooter" Ward, Jr. Scooter serves as associate pastor and minister of music to Community Church in Santa Rosa Beach, FL. After earning his B.A. in Theology from Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham, AL, he was commissioned as an officer in the United States Air Force. He holds an M.A. in Christian Studies and an MDiv from Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, GA, and a Doctor of Worship Studies from Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA.

Flying an airplane can be a daunting task. It requires countless hours of ground school and in-flight training with a skilled flight instructor. A student pilot needs a teacher to demonstrate the proper way to handle the aircraft, communicate on the radio, maintain situational awareness, and periodically coach them up as they progress in the training cycle. Even after a student pilot is certified and receives a pilot's license, the training, growing, and learning throughout the experience of flying never ceases. Their skills are honed and mastered as they learn from other more experienced pilots and often take advantage of the opportunity to split pilot-in-command responsibilities.

Although not perfectly congruent with this analogy, effective Christian mission certainly follows a similar process. That is exactly what Smither conveys in *Mission in the Way of Daniel*, as he uses the example of Daniel as a model for Christian mission in the 21st century. The book highlights

wisdom from the first six chapters of Daniel and articulates how these principles can be applied to effective Christian mission in the 21st century. He describes his approach by stating:

In this book, I unpack these qualities of Daniel's mission that are observable within the book of Daniel. I then explore them further in other parts of Scripture, in mission history, and in the contemporary world. Then I argue for why each quality is a necessary component of mission today.... In a world in which people are skeptical of religion and religious people, Christians following Daniel's model can provide a refreshing testimony for Christ.... Daniel's life, work, and witness speak to our times. (x-xi)

Although not required, a precursory reading of the first six chapters of the book of Daniel will serve to refresh readers on the narrative surrounding the themes the author borrows from this Old Testament prophet. Smither offers succinct yet helpful background and contextual information on Daniel in the appendix to his work. He recommends that his readers review it prior to diving into the main chapters of his book.

Smither frames *Mission in the Way of Daniel* in five chapters— each one addressing characteristics observed in the life of Daniel and God's work through him amid ungodly people in a foreign land. Daniel's life and witness in Babylon serve as a shining example of mission in today's world. At the outset, he defines mission as “crossing boundaries between the people of God and the not yet people of God” (ix). This definition is important to bear in mind while reading Smither's book.

In Chapter One, Smither addresses the displacement of Daniel as part of a pattern in Israel's history as well as God's wider redemptive mission for the world. Smither further describes themes of displacement throughout the Bible and church history with the accompanying vulnerabilities that provide opportunities for the people of God to trust Him and shine His light through the darkness.

Another factor that contributes to Christian mission in the 21st century is globalization, which Smither defines “as the interconnectivity of our world in the realms of business, government, and interpersonal relationships” (10). In essence, going unto all the world has shifted to a scenario where the world is coming unto us. Smither introduces an outside-the-box approach to missions called “diaspora missiology,” which he explains is “a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God's redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin” (12). This diaspora has brought the mission field

closer to everyone.

In Chapter Two, Smither looks at the natural abilities of Daniel and his companions as gifts for God's mission. These gifts opened doors of opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate His power and use their skills to gain a platform of influence among the nations where they were exiled. "Daniel's leadership and administrative skills were valued by two different imperial administrations," and, in turn, the Israelites "could concretely 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city' where they lived in exile (Jer 29:7)" (19). Smither notes, "One of the remarkable things about the mission of God in the Old Testament is that it was not primarily accomplished by priests but by professionals—government administrators, military leaders, kings, and other skilled laborers" to bring glory to God among the nations (23). Smither concludes this chapter by looking at God's power demonstrated throughout church and mission history. He proposes:

While we have often celebrated the place and service of professional ministers and missionaries, the global church must also learn to celebrate the role of those with natural and professional skills who are serving in the marketplace, the public square, where they can be a witness for Christ. (29)

Every child of God is on mission for Christ. Missionaries are vital to Kingdom work. Also, there are faithful coaches, teachers, doctors, blue-collar and white-collar professionals, and the like who are making an impact for Jesus in their respective communities, even without the "missionary" title. Smither challenges church leaders to pray over and commission them the same way they do missionaries because they are no different from the missionaries in their roles.

In Chapter Three, Smither launches into a discussion about God-given favor. He writes, "As people placed their trust in Israel's God, the Lord showed them his mercy and lovingkindness" (32). God's favor is seen as a practical application of His sovereign will to work out circumstances for the good of His people. For example, Daniel's God-given abilities, coupled with Divine favor, allowed him to flourish among the leadership in Babylon and Persia. Smither provides other remarkable examples from the Bible and church history where God's favor was demonstrated for mission and ministry. This underscores dependence upon God's blessing for the worker and the work to which he or she is called.

Chapter Four addresses the need to depend upon God's supernatural power for mission. Smither emphasizes the spiritual resource of prayer as

a relational component with God that invites His power to be experienced and demonstrated in and through the lives of His people. This chapter reads as a Biblical highlight reel showing God's power throughout history. "In power, we trust God to demonstrate his mighty acts through healing, deliverance, and other miracles...God is able, and that in demonstrating his power, he will draw people from every cultural group to himself in saving faith" (69). Prayer is the catalyst for unleashing God's power. Smither encourages the daily habit of personal prayer, utilizing the Lord's Prayer as a template to guide prayer.

In the fifth and final chapter, Smither looks at the bold witness of Daniel and his companions as models for action in the midst of suffering and persecution. Their confidence was seen in their sole allegiance being to God, giving Him glory at the display of His power, and boldly speaking the truth no matter the outcome. The author explains:

Though I believe God can use all forms of witness, a bold witness is ideally located within personal relationships of friendship, trust, and hospitality. We ask questions and listen and strive to understand the worldview of our non-believing friends. We also proclaim our faith while demonstrating tangible acts of ministry, including caring for the physical and emotional needs of the poor and refugees. But within those relationships, we also tell the truth to our friends: that we are sinners in a need of a Savior, and that Savior is our Lord Jesus Christ. (87)

Smither provides several examples throughout church history to demonstrate how many of the faithful witnesses were martyred for their faith. Nevertheless, they held fast to their convictions and entrusted their lives to God. Their faithfulness often led others to faith in Christ beyond their lifetimes. He challenges Christians to lead God-fearing lives like Daniel with courage and boldness before a watching world.

This book provides a succinct theological framework for approaching Christian mission. Though it is not an exhaustive work on missiology, it provides a good overview and foundation. I felt all the views presented were Biblical; however, one statement in the book raised concern for me. It was mentioned in chapter two that "the Bible does not condemn divination directly" (17). This statement flies in the face of five passages from Scripture that condemn divination directly: Deuteronomy 18:10-12, 1 Samuel 15:23, 1 Kings 17:17, Jeremiah 14:14ff., and Acts 16:16-18. I think Smither could have articulated this better so as not to cast aspersions on Daniel and his companions. Nevertheless, it is brief in its mention, and the many benefits of the work greatly outweigh this one mistake.

I recommend this book to pastors, Bible study teachers, and missionaries. It will serve to educate readers on the life of Daniel as a model for mission in the 21st century. It will also encourage Biblical approaches to missions. I enjoyed the parallels Smithers noted between the life of Patrick of Ireland and the life and witness of Daniel—namely, the courage and boldness of both. He writes, “Though I don’t advocate that twenty-first-century missionaries act recklessly or put anyone in danger, the principle of favor ought to challenge those who seem to prioritize security above all else in the work of mission” (44). God still moves today, and if we had the courage to lean into those promises, we might see the power of God displayed more frequently in opening doors and providing favor. The mission and mandate have not changed. God is still looking for faithful servants like Daniel, who will go forth and proclaim the gospel and be His light in a dark and dying world.