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BOOK REVIEW

H. Daniel Zacharias and Benjamin K. Forrest. *Surviving and Thriving in Seminary: An Academic and Spiritual Handbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017. 197 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-57799-778-8. \$17.99.

“What have I gotten myself into? What am I going to do now?” These thoughts and others like them have likely crossed many people’s minds upon first being confronted with the academic rigor and numerous other challenges that accompany any seminary program. Fortunately, Zacharias and Forrest have written an immeasurably useful little book to help one not only to “survive” but even to “thrive” in seminary. Written by two individuals who have “been where you are” (3), *Surviving and Thriving* was explicitly written for the purpose of making clear those “things that should be covered in every seminary orientation” (1). The authors state, “We want not only to help you understand the reality of what you are getting yourself into, but also to help equip you with the skills to succeed—spiritually, relationally, and academically” (1).

Incontrovertibly, the book delivers on its promise to help assist the fledgling seminary student by offering a wealth of practical tips, good advice, and other words of wisdom from an informed biblical and theological perspective—not to mention the invaluable assistance that they provide by engaging with an abundance of other resources, the specifics of which will be delineated in more detail below.

Aside from a brief introduction and some concluding final thoughts, the book is organized into three main parts: (1) “Preparation,” (2) “Managing Time and Energy,” and (3) “Study Skills and Tools.” Some of the specific topics that are covered in individual chapters include “Taking Care of Your Body,”

“Juggling Ministry with Your Studies,” “Research Skills,” “Reading and Writings Skills,” “Preparing Your Mind”/“Heart”/“Family” (each of which are individual chapters), and “Managing Your Time.” There are also three appendices that cover other topics, namely (1) “Choosing a Seminary,” (2) “Paying for Seminary,” and (3) “A Word to Spouses.” Regrettably, there is no name/subject or Scripture index, so finding specific information in the book can be quite difficult at times.

Throughout this volume, Zacharias and Forrest are forthright and candid in their discussion of the subject at hand. The authors themselves even state, “We’re . . . not going to coddle you or pull any punches. We know *exactly* how students sabotage themselves and procrastinate because we’ve done it and seen it done. Being a seminary student is rewarding, but it is also demanding. You need to know this ahead of time so you are not blindsided” (2, emphasis original). While one may think this particular method of presenting the content would be somewhat off-putting or counterproductive to the overall effectiveness of the book, the overarching mood of the volume remains one of hope and encouragement. Indeed, the otherwise fairly blunt messages that are often conveyed such as “the fact that if you’re a parent you still need to parent if you’re a seminary student” (2) are often tempered with numerous (but not too many) personal stories of the authors’ own missteps and personal journeys of discipleship.

Although many of the analogies and illustrations that Zacharias and Forrest use are fairly insightful and stimulating—see, for example, the concept of “well-digging” and “protecting the well” (esp. 27–28) and the encouragement to “be a buffalo . . . not a cow” when facing storms (12–13)—some of the points that are emphasized seem to rely excessively on emotion. One such example that stood out to me was this: “When you are in ministry later, you will always be able to go back and look up the definition of *antinomianism* later should you need it. You cannot go back to when your daughter was five and was excitedly recounting her realization that in heaven we get to meet Jesus!” (57). In my opinion, it would perhaps have behooved the authors to understate their points at times or craft their propositions in a somewhat less theatrical manner.

Interestingly (and also most welcome), the book contains numerous links (in framed but unshaded boxes) to various apps, videos, and other online resources. Material available on Zacharias' personal website addresses subjects such as "Finding Academic Resources for Theological Studies Utilizing ATLAS" and "Reading for Information Extraction." The authors also make extensive reference to various note-taking helps (e.g., Evernote, OneNote, DEVONthink, LiveScribe, and SmartPen), flash-card aids (e.g., Quizlet.com), popular presentation methods (e.g., PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi), calendar/scheduling tools (e.g., iStudiez Pro, myHomework, Passion Planner), bibliographic/reference-management devices (e.g., Zotero, Endnote, Bookends, Mendeley, Qiqqa, and Sente), and Bible software programs (e.g., Accordance, BibleWorks, WORDSearch, Logos). References to these resources and tools are quite helpful.

As much as one might appreciate this material, it is worth noting that one may perhaps question the unusually strong emphasis that is consistently placed upon Logos in particular. Zacharias, for example, states explicitly that "he has had many students tell him that one of the most important things he taught them is how to use Logos Bible Software" (164). While Zacharias's website does advertise a course entitled "Mastering Logos Bible Software," such explicit statements (especially since they are made on a consistent basis) could be viewed as advertisements for Logos. Note that *Surviving and Thriving* also appears as a full page advertisement in the March 2018 issue of *Didaktikos: Journal of Theological Education*, a series "written by professors, for professors" that is published by Faithlife, the maker of Logos Bible Software.

In addition to discussing online resources, the authors also recommend some books for further reading. One noteworthy recommendation is Helmut Thielicke's *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (translation 1962). However, as appreciable as the recommendations may be, the authors fail to mention a host of good books and articles that address the same general topic, such as Andreas J. Köstenberger's remarkable work *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (2011) and other helpful resources like John F. Evans' *A Guide*

to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works (2016). These omissions, I believe, detract from the usefulness of the work as a handbook.

That being said, *Surviving and Thriving* still provides the reader with a useful guide to the topic, including clear warnings concerning potential pitfalls. As such, those who are thinking about going into seminary or are currently involved in seminary in some fashion, whether regretting the decision to do so or simply looking for more tools to assist them in making an already good seminary experience even better, this book will provide help and encouragement. Its primary audience will be beginning seminary students and, one hopes, mentors/advisors of academic research students and the academic deans of Christian universities, Bible colleges, and seminaries.

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