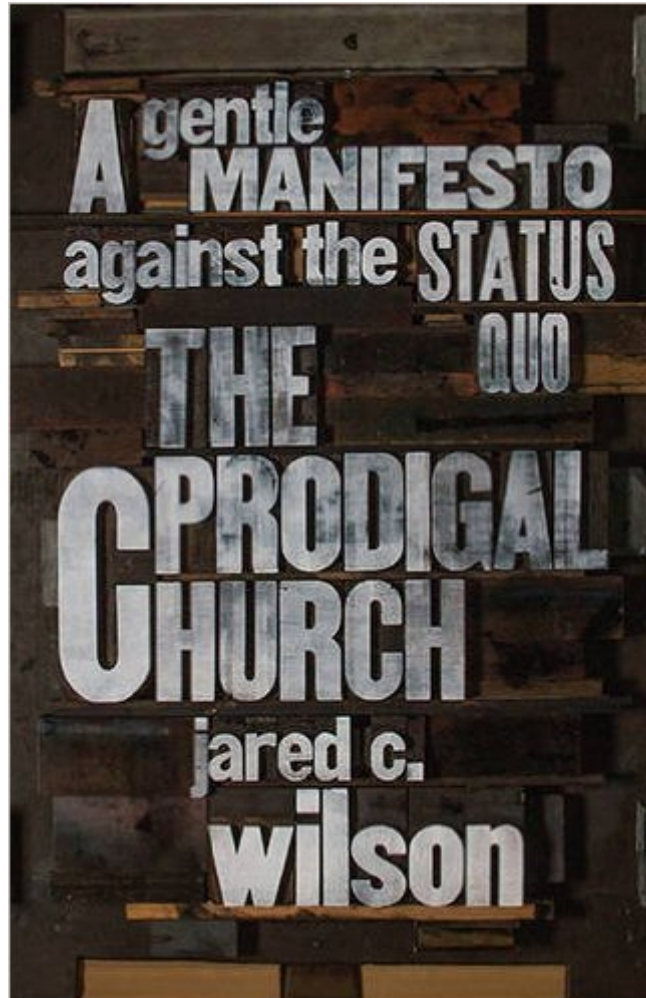


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# The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against The Status Quo



## Synopsis

This book is not a tired rant. This book is not a reactionary diatribe. This book is a gentle manifesto against the status quo. In *The Prodigal Church*, Jared Wilson challenges church leaders to reconsider their priorities when it comes to how they "do church" and reach people in their communities, arguing that we too often rely on loud music, flashy lights, and skinny jeans to get people in the door. Writing with the grace and kindness of a trusted friend, Wilson encourages readers to reexamine the Bible's teaching, not simply return to a traditional model for tradition's sake. He then sets forth an alternative to both the attractional and the traditional models: an explicitly biblical approach that is gospel focused, grace based, and fruit oriented.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

John MacArthur's book *Ashamed of the Gospel* changed my life. Literally. At the time I found it on the shelves of a local Christian book store I was attending a church that was committed to many of the principles of church growth. Though MacArthur had never attended that church, he understood it, he described it, he critiqued it. Best of all, he opened up God's Word and showed something much, much better. I soon found that I had to move on. I had to find a church that cared less about pragmatism and far more about the gospel. And, by God's grace, I did. Jared Wilson was once also caught up in the church growth movement. Like me he was reading the books, attending the conferences, measuring the statistics, and trying desperately to generate a great work at his church. And he was feeling that same restlessness, that same sense that this just

wasn't right, that this couldn't possibly be what church was meant to be. While the church growth movement has slowed and evolved in recent years, many of its principles remain foundational within evangelical churches. Many churches still hold to an attractional model by which they measure the success of any element of the service or any program by its ability to attract unbelievers. It is a way of ministry that derives from the primary purpose of making Christianity appealing. In *The Prodigal Church*, Wilson offers what he calls a gentle manifesto against the status quo "against that way of thinking of the church. This is not just another rant from someone convinced he knows a better way. It is not another diatribe. Rather, it is a manifesto. It stems from Wilson's own experience, heads straight to Scripture, and seeks God's wisdom." You and I are sitting down for coffee. Or a long breakfast, since this is a book, not a pamphlet. I ask you, as a friend, to hear me out. I have some concerns about the way you're doing church. You're on guard, because you're tired of rants, tired of legalistic whining, tired of reactionary diatribes. You just want to get on with God's mission. I want that too. But for this long breakfast, I ask you to put the guard down and let me speak to you as a friend. As one iron sharpening another." There are several elements in *The Prodigal Church* that I found especially appealing. The first is the deep focus on Scripture. Wilson's personal reformation, where he came to see such deep concerns with the attractional model of church, began with personal tragedy that drove him to see the Bible in entirely new ways. The Bible transformed him from within, allowing him to understand the utter centrality of the gospel (rather than programs) in the church. So while he does critique the seeker-friendly or attractional model, he does so by opening his Bible and showing where it falls short. Also, Wilson is a very capable writer and applies humor in appropriate ways and appropriate places. He often pokes fun at himself, showing himself as the one who was ignoring such basic wisdom and buying into such trite programs. He is equally vulnerable, telling his own life's story as an important part of the backdrop to his growing awareness of what the Bible says about church. In this way he continues to show that he is writing a book that is for himself first and the rest of us later "often a marker of the best kind of book. Because this book is not a diatribe but actually offers rich and compelling answers, I was challenged by it. My church is not often tempted toward the attractional model, but we may be tempted to swing the pendulum too far to the opposite extreme. Wilson offered gentle critique to us, too, and I appreciated the challenge. He affirmed what we are doing well, but also gently critiqued those areas where we have grown tired or complacent. I noticed that Matt Chandler's endorsement for Wilson's work begins like this: "Although I don't agree with all of the conclusions Jared comes to. And I doubt many

people will agree with all of his conclusions. But I think any wise pastor can learn with him. Any discerning pastor can benefit from asking the same questions, even if he arrives at different answers. And it is not only pastors who will benefit. After all, we are all members of churches and all responsible to ensure that we are members of good churches that are going about God's work in God's way. There is wisdom in this book for all of us, and for that reason I gladly commend it to every Christian to read and consider.

Everywhere you look there seems to be another book being released talking about the problems with the church. Whether specific doctrinal issues, styles of worship, types of bread used during communion, etc. There seems to be more and more books on how everyone is doing things wrong. With that being said, Jared Wilson has written a book, *The Prodigal Church*, that takes an in-depth look at two styles/approaches to church and while diving into the argument and differences between a traditional approach and an attractional/seeker approach to show a third way of doing church. Throughout the whole discussion, Wilson focuses on Christ and shows the importance that no matter what a church looks like or what approach to ministry they take, Christ must be the center of everything they are and they do. But with that in mind Wilson writes this book to bring attention that how we are doing ministry is important too. "How we do church shapes the way people see God and his Son and his ways in the world" (Kindle Loc. 205). Throughout *The Prodigal Church*, Wilson looks closely at the attractional church model and shows that while many large/mega churches today have been successful through this model the data and stories show that their success hasn't really done what they set out to do. The goal of most seeker churches is to reach the lost, and the data has shown that they have not done this but have grown through church transfers mostly. And through this they have attracted people mostly with a show and Wilson reminds that what a church attracts someone with is what they must keep them with. If it is through an attraction or event or program, they will eventually get bored with that or will see a better show in town and move towards that. Wilson keeps bringing the point back to the gospel and how it must be the focus and the center of all that a church does. Can a large/mega church make disciples that are making disciples? Absolutely! But this typically is not what is happening in larger churches. Metrics and measurements usually start and stop at "how many." How many attended? How many came forward? How many raised their hands? A church cannot stop at sheer numbers because numbers don't tell the whole story. Numbers don't show growth and maturity in Christ. This is harder to measure but it is important that a church is making disciples to be like Christ and moving them to make disciples in their

neighborhoods and cities. The attractional church often puts most or all their focus on just attendance numbers and "how many" numbers. How many participate in ministries can't show what matters. Wilson says, "It's possible to mistake the appearance of success for faithfulness and fruitfulness" (Loc. 591). Wilson throughout this whole book helps to show the importance of not just gathering a crowd but making disciples. As I said to start that there has been much written on this topic of how to do church better or reach the next generation. Most of what is out there misses that it begins with and always ends with Christ and following his command to make disciples. All that a church is doing must focus around this. Wilson begins and ends here in *The Prodigal Church*. I would highly recommend this book to all pastors and ministry leaders to start and encourage discussions together as staff and/or elders about the mission and purpose of your church and how you are making disciples that are making disciples in your church.

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