

Douglas Purnell, *Being in Ministry: Honestly, Openly and Deeply* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 167 pp.

“Finding light in darkness” is the underlying theological theme that flows through the pages of this book. Douglas Purnell entered his own deep darkness when a financial crisis at his institution caused his teaching position to be found “redundant.” Purnell invites the reader into his dark journey of grief, self-doubt, and anger and in the process continues his theological teaching through this book rather than the classroom. As a result, he is not only reaching students of pastoral care, but also students and pastors in supervised ministry, and as well as anyone engaged in ministerial formation and spiritual reflection.

Returning to the vocation of parish pastor, Purnell invites us into his private life of “being in ministry.” He writes, “Ministry is about being and not just doing, and the former is harder to grasp” (p. 14). Purnell helps us grasp the idea of “being” by allowing us to delve into his practice of ministry. That practice is not limited to the “doing” but rather includes the integration of his roles as family therapist, professor, pastor, artist, spouse, parent, and child. We are invited to join his whole human *being* as he explores hidden corners of being human and being a minister.

But the book is not just about this man’s personal, vocational, and spiritual journey. It is filled with the witnesses of many people. Purnell weaves their stories into his story. The reader learns that Purnell finds his true self, as well as God, through his “being” in ministry with parishioners, artists, family members, and strangers. In his introduction he writes: “The dark places are so much a part of life. The surprise, perhaps, is that when with integrity we enter the darkness, we find God hiding there” (p. xviii). The reader may also be surprised by the places where Douglas Purnell finds God is hiding.

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