



Pastoral
Confessions

*The Healing Path
to Faithful Ministry*

Jamin Goggin

“I read everything Jamin Goggin writes, and you should too. But this book is especially timely and profoundly needed in this critical moment. We stand at the edge of a great global spiritual revival that can speed up our finishing the task of the Great Commission in the next few years. The choice is ours. Augustine said, ‘The confession of bad works is the beginning of good works.’ It’s also the beginning of every true revival and spiritual awakening. The question is, Will we do what Jesus tells us to do? Will we remember the time we were closest to God, will we humbly repent—confessing and forsaking our idols that have distracted us—and will we return to the habits that keep us close to the heart of God? My passionate prayer is that God will use this straightforward book to cause revival in our hearts, our families, our churches, and all nations so that we are empowered with new boldness to finish the task of the Great Commission. Jesus’s last words must be our first priority. But Jesus also said not to do anything until you are empowered. Revival will energize our witness to the world.”

Rick Warren, Great Commission ally and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*

“I can’t remember the last time I read a book so convicting, with such intimate understanding of various challenges in pastoral ministry. Jamin is the kind of pastor I would trust with my confession, as he would point me toward forgiveness and healing in Christ. Heeding Jamin’s counsel isn’t easy, but a fresh wave of grace would flow through our churches if we did.”

Collin Hansen, vice president for content and editor in chief of The Gospel Coalition, executive director of The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics, and host of the *Gospelbound* podcast

“Searching our souls is hard work, but it is the hard work of walking with Jesus. Everyone in ministry needs to search their souls and confess the truth, and Jamin shows us the way by first modeling it and then guiding us into the art of confession. It is here where the Lord will revive his church. This is more than just an excellent book; it’s an important book.”

Lee Strobel, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Jamin Goggin is a thoughtful, prayerful guide in the journey toward soul health, and these pages could bring genuine and deeply needed healing and wholeness to the body of Christ.”

Ann Voskamp, *New York Times* bestselling author

“The church today is blessed with an abundance of books and resources aimed at helping us draw closer to God, reach others, plant churches, or know God’s Word better. But there are far too few resources like this one. Jamin Goggin calls us to confession both to God and to one another. This book is not to be read lightly. Jamin shows us the way to prayerfully, gracefully deal with our sin as God intended. Our fractured churches need this book. More than that, pastors need this book. Read it slowly, prayerfully. Read it with other pastors. Confession is God’s way to healing, and we need that today. Let these words rescue you and bring you to a new depth of intimacy with God and with others in his body.”

Ed Stetzer, dean, Talbot School of Theology

“*Pastoral Confessions* by Jamin Goggin is a deeply honest and profoundly insightful exploration of the challenges pastors face in their personal and vocational lives. Through the lens of the seven deadly sins, Goggin masterfully weaves Scripture, theology, and lived experience to illuminate the hidden struggles of ministry while offering the healing grace of confession as a path to renewal. This book is both a courageous invitation and a practical guide for pastors to embrace vulnerability, humility, and the transformative power of God’s love. It is an important read for anyone seeking a faithful and sustainable life in ministry.”

Chuck DeGroat, professor of pastoral care and Christian spirituality and executive director of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan; clinical therapist; and author of five books, including *When Narcissism Comes to Church* and *Healing What’s Within*

“Jamin Goggin’s *Pastoral Confessions* contributes significantly to a renewing interest in the tradition of the seven deadly sins. With

a biblical scalpel, Goggin, a longtime pastor himself, examines the vices that tempt the shepherds of God’s people. Going further still, he brings his own heart into the radiant light of God’s holiness. Such fearless, costly vulnerability can only be possible when someone grasps the expansive and extravagant love of Christ. Goggin makes a way for many to come after him, serving the church in the honest, humble power of our Lord.”

Jen Pollock Michel, author and speaker

“This is a very dangerous book. Do not read it unless you’re open to being exposed so you ‘come out’ as a sinner and receive God’s grace. Many pastors preach about this every week but feel like they’re an exception. This isn’t vague ‘vulnerability’ but a specific message to pastors that we all need to hear. Goggin’s handling of this sensitive topic is so wise and experientially deep that I hope every pastor reads it. Please. You’ll be stripped naked and clothed with Christ’s righteousness. Even preachers can be saved.”

Michael Horton, J. G. Machen Professor of Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary, California

“If you’re looking for lurid tales of pastoral scandal in this book, you will be disappointed. Nor is this just another book by some ‘bad boy’ theologian seeking to impress you with his transparency. Rather, using the classic seven cardinal sins as a mirror, Jamin Goggin candidly reminds pastors—and all the faithful—that by denying our sin, we make God a liar. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Read it and be blessed. You have nothing to lose except your guilt.”

Harold L. Senkbeil, author of *The Care of Souls*

“One of the greatest temptations for pastors is to focus so much on shepherding others that they lose touch with their own hearts. As leaders, however, we need God’s grace as much as anyone. In *Pastoral Confessions*, Jamin Goggin writes not just as a theologian but as a pastor who deeply understands the unique pressures and temptations of ministry. He shows that confession is not a burden

but rather the pathway to spiritual renewal and joy. This book gently pried open my heart, revealing how much I need Jesus, and then guided me to God’s tender mercy so that I can minister not out of performance but from a place of authenticity and renewal. Pastors need to read this book—not as another leadership manual but as an invitation to deeper humility, honesty, and dependence on Christ.”

Jeremy Treat, PhD, Wheaton College; pastor for preaching and vision at Reality LA, California; ministry affiliate faculty professor of theology at Biola University; and author of *The Crucified King*, *Seek First*, *The Atonement*, and *Renewal in Christ*

“We often need someone to go before us, to show us the way into the frightening unknown. A life of confession—brutal, beautiful honesty about our sin and brokenness—is one of these frightening unknowns, especially for pastors and church leaders in the modern age. In *Pastoral Confessions*, my friend Jamin Goggin goes before us, disentangling us from sin’s great lie, ‘that the place of healing is the place of harm.’ Full of deep wisdom and insight, this book can help free us from the temptation of image management and lead us to a life of freedom and joy as image-bearers.”

Jay Y. Kim, pastor and author

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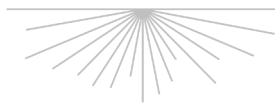
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To my beloved wife, Kristin,
thank you for faithfully sharing in this calling.
Without your love, which has endured all things,
I would not have persevered.
This book began with your painting.

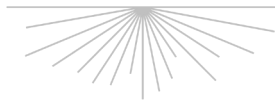
To my children, Emersyn, Sawyer, Finnley, and Thatcher,
thank you for being *you*. Surely, I am richly blessed
to be your dad. I have a secret to tell you . . .

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Introduction



Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way. . . .
For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.—Psalm 25:8, 11

[Regarding confession, some] flee from this work as being an exposure of themselves, or they put it off from day to day. I presume they are more mindful of modesty than of salvation, like those who contract a disease in the more shameful parts of the body and shun making themselves known to the physicians; and thus they perish along with their own bashfulness.—Tertullian

A minister must therefore diligently give heed to his internal condition and his external behavior.—Wilhelmus à Brakel

This is a book for the church. It is a book for sinners in need of grace, for rebels in need of the King's absolution, for spiritual harlots in need of the Groom's steadfast love. This book is for all those who know they are sick and in "need of a physician" (Mark 2:17). A word of warning to all those who say they are without sin:¹ This book will be

gibberish. If your spiritual self-diagnosis reads “clean bill of health,” this book will read like the unintelligible handwriting of a doctor using strange medical jargon.

This is a book for all those who are ready to flush the new-age medicine of self-help down the drain. It is a book for all those who are ready to scrap the Pelagian strategies of behavior modification.² It is a book for those who are ready to really do something about their sin. Or, perhaps better said, to do something *Christian* about their sin. These words are for all those whose hearts are ready to cry out, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). It is a book for all those ready to confess their sins and experience God’s forgiveness.³

Confession

As Christians, we are called to confess our sins to God and to one another. Ultimately, our confession is always to God because it is God we have *ultimately* sinned against.⁴ In confession, we prayerfully “draw near to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16) as those united with Christ by the Spirit. But our confession cannot merely be a secret kept between us and God. For our union with Christ entails a union with his body, the church. True Christian confession is embodied, meaning it is a practice of the body of Christ. We must confess our sins to one another,⁵ for the healing power of God’s grace meets us in and through the body of Christ by the power of his indwelling Spirit.

This is a book *of, about, and for* confession. As a book *of* confession, it contains my own personal confession to God and to you. In these pages you will hear of my sin, and you will hear of God’s grace in my life. I have written in a confessional mode, believing if I am going to ask you to confess your sins, I must go first. As a book *about* confession, it endeavors to provide a basic account of what Christian confession is. This basic account of

confession is given more specificity throughout the book as I consider the need for confession in seven primary areas of sin—pride, wrath, lust, gluttony, acedia, envy, and avarice. Finally, as a book *for* confession, it includes encouragement for you to confess your sins to God and one another. My prayer is that you would experience, in your confession, the cleansing and healing grace of God.⁶

I realize asking my readers to confess their sins is a bold request, but I believe such a request is in fact the most gracious invitation I can offer. To read this book strictly for the purpose of literary curiosity, theological inquiry, or as fodder for teaching would surely be to miss the one thing necessary: a humble and honest encounter with Jesus.⁷ If you are willing to accept my invitation, I want to offer you some brief counsel for reading this book confessionally.

First, to read confessionally, you will need to read *prayerfully*. Reading prayerfully means reading *intentionally*. Don't prayerlessly dive right into reading. Each time you pick up this book, I encourage you to pause and take a moment to prayerfully communicate your intention to be with God in your reading. One simple way you can do this is to begin each time of reading by briefly praying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" (Ps. 139:23). Reading prayerfully also means reading *patiently*. Don't rush through the book. Each chapter will invite you to consider a different primary sin—pride, wrath, lust, gluttony, acedia, envy, and avarice. Prayerful consideration of each of these sins in your life will necessitate reading in an unhurried manner. One simple way to read patiently for the sake of confession is to intermittently pause throughout your reading to pray the words of Psalm 139:24: "See if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Reading patiently will necessitate a confessional pause between each chapter. Don't quickly jump from one sin to the next. At

the end of each chapter, I have provided a prayer of confession corresponding to each sin. Use these prayers as a starting point for your own personal confession.

Second, to read confessionally, you will need to read *relationally*. Reading relationally means reading *conversationally*. Before you dive into this book, identify someone you can read and discuss the book with. This may be one trusted friend, or it may be a trusted group. The key word here is *trusted*. Choose a reading partner who can be a confession partner, someone you can trust to be honest, caring, and appropriately confidential. Make a plan to read the book at a prayerful pace for the sake of shared personal confession. Reading relationally also means reading with *humility*. In other words, choose a confession partner who will speak the truth in love to you.⁸ You need someone who will not only hold you accountable but also uplift you with the gospel of grace. Here, we do well to recall the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:9–10: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” Don’t pridefully face your sin alone. Humbly rely upon the care of others.

For those in need of more practical guidance in praying your confession or in engaging in confessional conversation, I have provided two appendixes in the back of the book. The first appendix is a guide for prayerful confession with God. The second appendix is a guide for conversational confession with another. These guides are not essential for reading this book, but they may prove helpful.

To Whom It May Concern

While this is a book for the church, it is a book that particularly concerns certain members of God’s household. First and

foremost, I have written this book *for* pastors. The words on these pages primarily concern all those who have taken up the graced calling of pastoral ministry. Secondly, I have written this book with prayerful concern for those who have been impacted by pastoral sin. If you belong to one of these two groups within the body of Christ, I want to take a moment to directly address you before you dive into the book.

Dear pastors, thank you for taking the time to read this book. I recognize your time is precious, and much of your reading is, by necessity, dedicated to sermon preparation, ministry planning, and leadership development. This book is not written for those purposes. It is an invitation to confess your sins and experience God's healing grace. I extend this invitation to you as one who firmly believes by confessionally paying careful attention to yourself, you will be strengthened by God's grace to faithfully attend to "all the flock" of God (Acts 20:28).

Pastor, if you receive this invitation, I encourage you to embrace the *prayerful* and *relational* modes of reading I have commended above. Read primarily for the sake of making your own confession. Beware the temptation to read merely for the sake of concept analysis and content mining. As teachers of God's Word, we are often "on the clock" for next Sunday's sermon or next month's Bible study. As a result, we are conditioned to read with an eye toward teaching. Perhaps, if we are honest, we don't feel like we have the time for patient confession. Here, we do well to remember the words of James 3:1: "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." Surely, faithful teachers are faithful confessors. Likewise, pastors, beware the temptation to read primarily for the sake of criticizing fellow pastors. Remember the words of Jesus: "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's

eye” (Matt. 7:5). To wisely “distinguish good from evil” in the church (Heb. 5:14), we first need to judge ourselves rightly before the Lord.

If you are a pastor seeking to read relationally, I encourage you to read with a fellow pastor. By choosing to read with a pastor, you are choosing to confess your *pastoral sins* with a co-laborer who shares in the trials and temptations of your vocation. I believe fellow pastors can uniquely challenge, encourage, and support one another in their shared work. Throughout this book you will hear a charge to embrace the vulnerability and honesty required for personal confession. At times, I will talk about confessing my sins “publicly.” I am not suggesting such a “public” confession is required of you. However, I do believe we all need to confess our sins to one another. This can begin with your pastoral confession partner. However, there are sins that are disqualifying for pastoral office and must be confessed to the elders, presbytery, bishop, or other leaders of the church. There are sins that are clearly not disqualifying and can be shared appropriately with the congregation as a means of instructively modeling confession. The principles of vulnerability and honesty in confession require the pastor to first and foremost confess their sins to those called to discern their qualification for office and tasked with sharing the yoke of ministry alongside them.

Pastors are getting a bad rap these days. No doubt, we have done something to deserve it. The all-too-common headlines about failing and fallen pastors are certainly not just fake news. We must be honest, there are far too many pastors who have been disqualified from ministry due to the nature and severity of their sin in recent years. Nevertheless, it is my belief that there are far more pastors who remain qualified. They are *qualified sinners*. I have no data to prove it, but I believe this group of qualified sinners is the majority. If you belong to that group,

I want to say to you directly, confess your sins so that you can finish the race well.⁹

The church needs *confessing pastors*. God's flock needs shepherds who know what it is to stumble and be carried,¹⁰ who know what it is to be led in their sickness to streams of living water,¹¹ who know what it is to go astray and be brought home by the pursuing grace of the Good Shepherd.¹² The church needs *qualified sinners saved and sanctified by grace*. The church needs pastors who shepherd as those who know themselves as sheep first. Only shepherds who truly know God's forgiveness can proclaim it as good news in integrity. Only pastors who live by grace are qualified to shepherd others in the way of grace.

Dear brothers or sisters in Christ who have been impacted by the sin of a pastor, thank you for opening the pages of this book. My heart is tender toward you. I imagine many of you reading this book have been impacted by pastoral sin, either *directly or indirectly*. Directly, in the sense that a pastor has personally sinned against you. Indirectly, in the sense that you have become aware of the sins of a pastor whom you do not know but whose sins you have nevertheless been impacted by. The sin of a pastor can not only cause harm but also form in us fear and distrust in our ongoing relationship with the church. After two decades of pastoral ministry, one thing is clear to me: My sin has impacted others. The most faithful pastors I know are sinners. Their sin has undoubtedly impacted the body of Christ. To all those affected by my sin in ways I may never know, I sincerely apologize. To all those affected by the sins of a fellow pastor, I am sorry for your hurt.

If you are reading this book as one wounded by a pastor, I want to offer some brief guidance. First, I encourage you to discern whether you should read this book right now. This is a book all about *pastoral sin*. For some, it may provoke painful memories. No doubt, it has the potential to unearth places

of pain, grief, anxiety, and anger in our hearts. If we have yet to pray through or receive intentional care for our wounds of pastoral sin, it may be wise to wait to read this book. In all, I would encourage you to seek wise counsel from a trusted soul-care provider to help you discern the timing of your reading. Second, if you do continue to read, I want to encourage you to first read for the sake of your own confession. Don't merely read for the sake of identifying the sins of a pastor. Indeed, I hope that this book can help you name the ways in which a pastor has sinned against you, but I want you to be able to do so with grace and truth. In order to do this, you will need to first name the sin in your own life. Remember the words of Christ: "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5). Finally, I want to remind you this book is *chiefly* written for pastors to confess their sins. As such, it is not primarily written for the purpose of providing guidance to those who have been impacted by pastoral sin. While I do believe this book can help you name the ways you have been sinned against, it does not seek to provide guidance in pursuing reconciliation, discerning church discipline, or receiving proper care. If you have been impacted by pastoral sin and are seeking guidance, there are many other books written for the express purpose of providing practical wisdom in this regard.¹³

Speaking Christianly

As a book for the church, these are words in service to Christ the eternal Word. As a "man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5), I submit my words to him whose Word makes clean.¹⁴ I pray that by his Spirit these words would be a faithful interpretation of his Word, which is "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"

(2 Tim. 3:16). I pray that God would use these words to breathe his Word of life into the church¹⁵ and consequently bring glory to Christ alone. For surely, the glory of Christ is his body, the church, fully alive.¹⁶

This conviction regarding the relationship between my words and God's Word has intentionally shaped two elements of this book. First, you will notice throughout the book I repeatedly allude to, reference, and directly quote Holy Scripture. I seek to write as one who has meditated on God's Word, and as a result I intend to write in such a way that encourages you to do the same. As you read, I encourage you to view the many biblical references you come across as invitations to prayerful meditation of Scripture. Allow your reading of this book to be interrupted by the reading of God's Word. Second, you will notice throughout the book allusions, references, and direct quotations of various saints from church history. In the process of writing this book, I invested significant time reading church fathers, desert fathers and mothers, Protestant reformers, and Puritans. I did this believing that, in order to speak words that are faithful to God's Word, I must heed the words of this cloud of witnesses.¹⁷ In short, faithful Christian speech is the fruit of listening to God's Word by the Spirit with the communion of the saints.

I pray the words on these pages are *Christian* words. My prayer is that these words will equip the church to speak *Christianly*. Specifically, it is my hope that these words will help pastors and those hurt by pastors speak of sin, confession, and grace with fluency. I believe we have lost touch with the biblical idiom and the vernacular of church tradition regarding such things. When our primary language is lost, we search for other ways to communicate. In recent years I have noticed the church using language other than our native tongue to name the problems we see. We use words like *spiritual abuse*, *toxic*

leadership, and *narcissism* to name what is *Christianly* called *pastoral sin*. A psychological and sociological vocabulary has largely replaced a theological vocabulary. While this language can be helpful as a secondary language, it is my belief that it ought not be our primary language. Our primary language must be *Christian*. If we fail to speak of sin, we will fail to speak of confession, and if we fail to speak of confession, we will fail to speak of God. More importantly, if we fail to speak *Christianly* about pastoral sin, we will fail to confess our sin to God. A loss of Christian speech is, in the end, a loss of the language of prayer.

The Road Ahead

Before you lies a healing path to faithful ministry. It is the pathway of confession. To walk this road in wisdom requires that you walk “in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25), which, as I have already noted, necessitates a prayerful pace. Having said that, I recognize that to pace yourself well, you need to have some sense of where you are going and how long it might take you. To that end, I want to offer you a brief map of the journey before you.

The road begins in chapter 1 with a vision for the necessity and value of *pastoral confession*. From there, you are invited to walk the pathway of confession. Each chapter is an individual step along the way, inviting you to confess specific pastoral sins—pride, wrath, lust, gluttony, acedia, envy, and avarice. In the final chapter, you will be given a vision for the long road of pastoral ministry ahead, a road that must be traveled by faith, hope, and love.

As you embark on this journey, remember the path of confession is not yours to travel alone. Thanks be to God, this is not a self-guided expedition. Rather, the road of confession is always

guided by the Good Shepherd, Jesus. If you find along the way that you have strayed farther from his path of righteousness than you had known, remember he is the Good Shepherd who finds every stray sheep and rejoices at their repentance.¹⁸ If you find along the way that the depth of your sin is greater than you had known, remember he is the Good Shepherd who “knew no sin” and yet was “made . . . to be sin . . . so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Have courage to trust in the gospel. By faith remember that by his substitutionary death you are completely forgiven of your sin and free of condemnation. So come to the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5).