

JEN WILKIN
& J. T. ENGLISH

YOU ARE
— A —
THEOLOGIAN

AN INVITATION TO KNOW
AND LOVE GOD WELL

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INTRODUCTION

What a Generation Forgot

This book exists to serve the part of the Great Commission a generation of church leaders forgot. When we think of Jesus's command in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples, we tend to assign it to the category of evangelism. We picture Jesus's disciples fanning out across the known world armed with gospel tracts or a hand-sketched diagram showing the sin gap that separates us from God, and a cross to span that gap. We picture joyful conversions followed by joyful baptisms. And then we picture those evangelists moving on to the next town, carrying the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to the ends of the earth.

But if our understanding of the Great Commission is primarily a call to evangelism, we have forgotten a key piece of what it requires:

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“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.*” (Matt. 28:19–20, emphasis added)

Jesus’s final command is not a call to make converts, but a call to make disciples. And as the Great Commission states, that call will require us to teach converts to *observe all that has been commanded*. Arguably, we have no power to make converts. But making disciples? According to Jesus, we are to replicate ourselves by passing along the good deposit that was passed along to us.

In one sense, the Great Commission is not new when we hear it uttered by Jesus. It sounds a great deal like David’s claim that “one generation will declare your works to the next and will proclaim your mighty acts” (Ps. 145:4). It sounds a lot like Moses’s exhortation to Israel:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to *teach you to observe* in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give

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you, and so that you may enjoy long life. . . .
These commandments that I give you today
are to be on your hearts. Impress them on
your children. Talk about them when you sit
at home and when you walk along the road,
when you lie down and when you get up.
Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind
them on your foreheads. Write them on the
doorframes of your houses and on your gates.
(Deut. 6:1–2, 6–9 NIV, emphasis added)

A disciple is a learner. In the Great Commission, as in Deuteronomy 6, those who are more mature in the faith are called to teach those who are less mature, training them into the core beliefs of the faith. Discipleship is both a skill and a discipline (as the term *disciple* indicates), requiring effort and commitment, as all worthwhile skills do.

Conversion happens in an instant. Discipleship, on the other hand, is the work of a lifetime. It involves the transmission of an ancient faith from one generation to the next.

So, how are we doing with that?

According to most indicators, not great. In 2022, Lifeway Research and Ligonier Ministries partnered to release a report on the state of theology in the church. They surveyed both Christians and non-Christians on their understanding of basic Christian theology, the essential beliefs that define who

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is a Christian and who is not. The results among non-Christians were predictably dismal, but it's the results among professing Christians that are particularly alarming. Consider just a few of the findings:

- God learns and adapts to different circumstances: **48%** of evangelicals agree
- Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God: **65%** of evangelicals agree
- God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: **56%** of evangelicals agree
- Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God: **43%** of evangelicals agree (up from **30%** in 2020)¹

Let that sink in. Professing Christians in staggering numbers don't understand or ascribe to the most basic beliefs of the faith they claim to stake their lives on. They lack basic theological understanding. And the trends show that the knowledge gap is not getting better, but worse. It would appear that one generation has failed to tell the next. It would appear that we have made converts, but not disciples.

How did we get here? If a disciple is a learner, a discipler is a teacher. But we cannot teach what we ourselves have never been taught. We cannot transmit to another generation what has not been transmitted to us. And we will not aspire to teach

anyone else the basic beliefs of our faith if we do not consider ourselves primarily as disciplers. We must learn to think of ourselves from a different angle. We must see ourselves not merely as evangelists or as mentors or as casual participants in a system of belief. We must see ourselves as theologians.

J. T.'s Story

I will never forget my first theology class in seminary. It would be hard for me to overstate how intimidated I was. Not only am I not a great student (I was accepted into college under academic probation), but now I was entering into a field of study I knew nothing about. I didn't grow up in the church, so things like the Bible, theology, and church history seemed like they were for superspiritual Christians. Don't get me wrong; I certainly wanted to grow—that's why I was there—but I still didn't know if I belonged. To me, theology just seemed like old books, lots of footnotes, and words I had to look up.

As I sat down in that first class, all kinds of questions were racing through my head: *Am I smart enough to do this? Is the material going to be way over my head? Will I walk out of these doors embarrassed? Should I be making this kind of investment of time and resources into something I know nothing about? Every question centered around this idea: Do I even belong here?*

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I felt so out of place. In the classroom, there were about a hundred students buzzing around with excitement. From my perspective, they all appeared to be so confident, so eager, so prepared and excited to be there. As I sat toward the back of the class, thoughts of inadequacy were piling on. *Is it possible that God just wants me to have a simple faith and leave the theology to the experts? After all, Peter and John were uneducated and common disciples, but people knew they were followers of Jesus (Acts 4:13). I would settle for that description of me: uneducated, common, but with Jesus.*

Right then, the professor walked into the classroom.

The buzz that once filled the room quickly went silent. He carried himself with a sense of gravity that matched his extremely credentialed academic background. He introduced himself by showing us pictures of his family and talking about his interests and hobbies. We quickly began to read through the syllabus as he discussed our various writing assignments, books that we would read, a group project, and expectations that he was going to hold us to.

To put it bluntly, I was ready to walk out. *I cannot do this*, I thought. It is one thing to have syllabus shock, but it is another thing to have syllabus shock when the topic is God Himself. Instead of walking out, I decided to simply let the class finish so I would not call attention to myself.

After we finished going through the syllabus, the professor took a blue dry-erase marker and walked over to the

whiteboard. He slowly wrote one word on the whiteboard: *theology*. He turned around and asked the classroom to define the term. A few brave students began to answer. One student said, “The study of the Bible.” Another student said, “History of Christianity.” One more student proposed, “A study of truth.”

After several more attempts, the professor drew a horizontal line through the word *theology*, kind of like this: theo | logy. He then said, “Theology is simply words about God.”

That seemed like too simple of a definition. Theology is just words about God? It has to be more than that, right? He began to teach us that the Greek term for God is *theos* and the Greek term for word is *logos*. Therefore, *theos* + *logos* = theology, or words about God.

Then he asked us the question, “Who has words about God?” Just like before, some brave students began to answer. One student said, “Pastors and ministry leaders.” Another student said, “Professors and academics.” The professor seemed to nod in agreement, but then he said, “Who else?”

The room was silent again. Who else does theology other than pastors, ministry leaders, professors, and professional academics? I’ll never forget what the professor said next. Very quietly, he said, “Everybody.”

Everybody? How can everybody be a theologian?

I know I’m not a theologian. I know my wife is not a theologian. I know my parents are not theologians. How can everyone

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be a theologian? If I am already a theologian, then why do I need to go to seminary. I came to seminary so that I could become a theologian, not because I already am a theologian.

He continued to explain that everybody has words about God. Certainly pastors, ministry leaders, and professors have words about God, but so do moms, dads, lawyers, health-care professionals, Hindus, Buddhists, even agnostics and atheists. Everyone has words about God; therefore, everyone is a theologian. The question is not whether we are theologians but whether we are good ones or bad ones.

He then asked every single student to stand up and repeat after him: “My name is _____ and I am a theologian.”

The first time we tried it, there were a few giggles, and certainly a lack of confidence for most of us.

He then said, “Let’s try that again with a little more confidence. Repeat after me: ‘My name is _____ and I am a theologian.’”

The second time through it felt a bit more natural to all of us. I said with confidence, “My name is J. T. English, and I am a theologian.”

Ever since that day, I have thought about myself a little bit differently. No matter what my vocation is, no matter how young I am or how old I am, no matter my family situation, my income level, or my geographical location, I will always be a theologian.

Jen's Story

I have an English degree. That's it. I didn't attend Bible college. I didn't attend seminary. I got an English degree because I loved language. I won spelling bees and essay contests my whole academic life, and I can diagram sentences as a professional sport. Unfortunately, no one wants to watch that on ESPN. I am a grammarian, complete with hot takes about the Oxford comma and the proper use of *lay* and *lie*. And I can attest to the fact that everyone is a grammarian, but not necessarily a good one. Everyone is obeying rules of grammar, but some of us are using the wrong rules. If you don't know the proper usage of the verbs *lay* and *lie*, you're one of those people. And I'm judging you so hard.

But even in my grammatical dogmatism, I can concede that not much is at risk when those rules are not observed. The same cannot be said of theology. Everyone is a theologian, and the better we are at it, the more this world functions as it was designed to.

While J. T. was discovering he was a theologian and growing in his ability to operate as such, I was floundering around in my local church trying not to teach error, unsure of where I should turn for help.

First, I taught seventh-grade Sunday school. I had grown up in the church, so I tried to replicate what had been done for me when I was in seventh grade. We used a workbook to

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go through the Gospel of John. Was it a good workbook? I had no idea. Based on the (flawed) premise that all contact with the Bible was good contact, I forged ahead.

Next, I was unexpectedly asked to teach a women's Sunday school class. That's when the panic set in.

I was twenty-nine, younger than everyone else in the class, and I had no blueprint. I also had no training and way less life experience than my students. They were divorced, widowed, married to unbelievers. They had suffered infertility, the loss of children and spouses, physical and emotional suffering. They were battling fears and sins I couldn't relate to, and my life looked dramatically uncomplicated by comparison to theirs. With no training and no battle scars to speak of, what on earth could I possibly teach them that wouldn't seem flippant or fraudulent?

We started sloggng our way through the One-Year Bible, but each week's reading posed more questions than it answered. My husband, Jeff, had begun listening to a radio show during his commute called *Renewing Your Mind* by R. C. Sproul. Dr. Sproul referenced Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, and Jeff gifted it to me for my thirtieth birthday.

Everything changed. Pregnant with my fourth child and with three others under the age of four, I devoured doctrines during naptime and evenings. If the kids were asleep and I was awake, I was probably reading. All of a sudden, I discovered categories I had never known for the ideas I could

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see in Scripture. And apparently, these categories were not new—they were just new to me. I read Berkhof, and I started reading R. C. Sproul. I mined his footnotes for other authors, and a world opened up to me that I had not known existed.

My Sunday school class became a place I could connect different doctrines to the passages of Scripture we were reading that week. I began to feel more competent, and my confidence as a teacher grew. Whereas I had previously thought the role of a Bible teacher was to build a new teaching out of thin air, now I realized it was to transmit old and time-tested teachings to new ears. Through the centuries, others had built a reliable framework for how to think about God, and that framework was available to me. I could make it available to those I taught.

In all of this, not once did I think of myself as a theologian. Berkhof? Yes. Sproul? Obviously. All those voices I found in the footnotes? Theology giants. I, on the other hand, was a lay leader in a corner of the local church no one paid attention to, teaching a demographic no one expected much from, with no formal training and none on the horizon.

Two decades later, I still don't have formal training. But I know this with certainty: *I am a theologian.*

And I want *you* to know it too. All of us have words about God. We can grow in our ability to make those words accurate and good, edifying for others, glorifying to the One they describe. Not only are we all theologians, but we are so

by design. We were created to think and speak words about God that represent Him rightly. We are built for theological thought and discourse—every last one of us. I’m still not the theologian I should be, but I’m working on it.

And I’m inviting you to do the same. Whether you share words about God around a dinner table, in a Sunday school classroom, at a coffee shop, in a workplace, or on a social media platform, you can grow in your fluency. And God will yield a harvest from your efforts.

Your Story

The Great Commission calls disciples to make disciples. What is a disciple? A theologian learning to be a Christian theologian. A person with words about God learning to have true words about God and to live in light of them.

Maybe you picked up this book with a major sense of impostor syndrome. Maybe you picked it up out of sheer curiosity. Or maybe out of desperation because you feel ill-equipped to do the work the Lord has given you to do. We want to help.

This book has two primary goals. The first is for you to see yourself, and everyone else, as a theologian. We want you to perceive your role in worshipping and proclaiming the one true God. We want you to understand yourself as someone who has been invited into the Christian task of thinking and

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living in accordance with who God is. Because if you can understand that, you will be ready to take your place in the Great Commission call to make disciples.

Our second goal is for you to grow in your knowledge and love of God through theology. God is an inexhaustible well of beauty, riches, and glory. Theology invites us into beholding and enjoying Him as such. We want to convince you that all of life is ultimately about theology because all of life is lived in reference to who God is, who we are, what He has done, and what He is doing. It is our love for God that fuels our desire and our efforts to tell the next generation. We teach others because to remain silent is unimaginable, so marvelous is this God we know.

As you can tell by now, this book is coauthored. It's coauthored by two friends—two friends who've learned how to do theology together. We have learned separately, learned from each other, and have agreed or disagreed with each other depending on the day and the topic. That's how theology is supposed to work. Both of us will share stories in our own voices, and when we do that, we will make it clear. Otherwise, we have written this book together with one voice. That's because we share a mission to catalyze Christians in all contexts and all around the world to awaken to their identity as theologians—as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We have worked shoulder to shoulder in both local and parachurch spaces to build and replicate equipping ministries so that this

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generation of believers would not be panicked but prepared to pass along the good deposit to the next.²

This book is, in large part, the result of that work. It will teach you basic theology, but more than that, it is an invitation into lifelong contemplation, celebration, worship of, and service to the one true God. Because even after you read the last page, the joyful task of theology will have just begun. Theology is meant to be the work of your lifetime, one in which you are not merely a consumer of but a contributor to the conversation about God.

Since that's the case, take your pen and fill in the blank:

“My name is _____ and I am a theologian.”

Now, read that sentence out loud. How does it feel? It's a statement that has always been true of you in one way or another. Let's ensure it is true of you in a way that marks you as a disciple of Christ, a theologian who patterns their heart, soul, mind, and strength after Jesus of Nazareth.

A book cannot make you a theologian because *you already are a theologian*. Be the best one you can.

The next generation of disciples is waiting to be formed. The church of tomorrow needs good, faithful, humble theologians today. They are waiting for you.

Welcome to the conversation. Welcome to the mission.

CHAPTER 1

Why Does Theology Matter?

Theology is words about God. You are a theologian. Be a good one.

We have posed some basic definitions and challenges, but perhaps you're not yet convinced theology really matters. Why not just stick to the Bible? What, exactly, is the relationship between the Bible and theology? When we set out to study theology, are we adding to God's Word and complicating what is straightforward?

If you're not asking these questions, you should be.

To help answer them, we can look to the Bible for help. In particular, we can look to the examples of two key figures: Adam and Jesus. In the creation account of Genesis 1, we see God bring order to the world, populating the sea, skies,

and land. We know His creation is one way that God reveals Himself to us. We can look at what is made—mountains, sunsets, hummingbirds—and know something of His unseen attributes (Rom. 1). But God does something worth noting in Genesis 1:28: He charges the man and woman to take up and continue the work of bringing order to the world.

God blessed them, and God said to them,
“Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and sub-
due it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of
the sky, and every creature that crawls on the
earth.”

And immediately in chapter 2 we see Adam do exactly that. God brings all of the animals to Adam to be named, to be taxonomized, as it were.

He does not say, “Let there be a new species of hippopotamus.” No, the work of creation is finished. Rather, he says, “Here is a hippopotamus, and here is a water buffalo.” He does not add to God’s creation; Adam simply brings organizing language to what already exists. In doing so, he is bearing the image of an orderly God. And he is fulfilling the command God has given him to take dominion.

You do similar things, as well. You probably use a calendar to keep your meetings and other commitments in view. Maybe you have bought organizer bins to arrange your socks and T-shirts in your closet or the items in your pantry. Maybe

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you own a labeler that makes you very happy. Maybe you've developed a filing system to keep your files in order. All of these organizational efforts do not add to what is being organized; they simply make those items accessible and useful. In a small way, you are bringing about order as you were created to do.

Like taxonomies, organizer bins, filing systems, and calendars, theology is a means of organizing the ideas given to us in God's Word. Theology does not add to those ideas; it simply gives us a way to understand them comprehensively from Genesis to Revelation. Theology sorts ideas into categories, it provides helpful labels, it orders relationships and events from a high-level view.

We see Jesus do the ordering work of theology in a famous scene that occurs after His resurrection. In Luke 24, we find two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus trying to make sense of all that has just occurred in Jerusalem. Jesus greets them, though they do not recognize Him, and He asks them what they are talking about. They recount the confusing events that have occurred since His crucifixion. Luke notes that Jesus responds in this way:

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

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Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.
(Luke 24:25–27)

In response to their confusion, Jesus gives these two disciples a theology lesson. On a seven-mile walk that would have taken a little over two hours, He teaches them the doctrine of Christ. They knew the Old Testament prophecies. What they needed was a high-level view. He gives them an organizational lens on revelation they already had. Just as Adam brought order to natural revelation, Jesus brings order to the special revelation of the Old Testament writers.

When we do theology, our task is not to add to what God has revealed in the Scriptures, but to order it. Theology is a way to organize and better know and understand what God has gifted us in special revelation.

Why Does Theology Matter?

Theology matters because it shapes us not merely at the intellectual level, but at the emotional and the practical level. One of the greatest misconceptions about theology is that it is something learned in a classroom or through reading a book. Christians do not merely learn theology; they “do theology.” The grammarian in Jen does not love this phrase, but it is

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commonly used for a reason. It communicates the holistic impact of theology on our lives: we think differently, feel differently, and act differently as a result of developing better categories for understanding God.

Theology is not done exclusively or even primarily in the classroom. It is done in everyday life, every minute of every day. We are doing theology when we preach, pray, and sing, but we are also doing theology when we go to work, when we take a vacation, as we care for an aging parent, as we fight sin, as we raise kids, as we mourn the loss of a loved one, as we spend our money, and as we grow old. You are a theologian, and you are always doing theology.

“Theology for Academics”

If this is true, then doing theology is a consequential endeavor. Why, then, do many avoid taking up the task of getting better at it? One common hurdle is the perception that theology is overly academic. To be honest, sometimes it can be, but that doesn't mean it can't also be accessible. Because academics do theology at a level some of us never will doesn't mean all of us should avoid doing theology altogether. Most of us will never get a PhD in applied mathematics, but we still benefit from learning math beyond a rudimentary understanding for the purpose of conducting our everyday lives well. Theological concepts can and should be accessible

to everyone: kids, parents, young professionals, people with PhDs or GEDs.

“Theology Is Impractical”

A second obstacle is the perception that doing theology is impractical. Everyone wants to live a life that makes sense. We want to give our lives to what matters most. This isn't true for Christians only; it's true for all people—just look at how impassioned people are about the causes they support, their political convictions, and even their favorite sports teams. Put simply, we all want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, and we want our lives to matter. If theology is simply words about God, and God is the most important being—the ultimate Reality—is there anything that matters more? And, for that matter, is there anything more practical? If theology is understanding who God is and orienting our lives to that, is there anything more important for us? There is nothing more practical than a life well lived, and theology is a means to that end.

“Theology Is Heartless”

A third obstacle is the perception that theology emphasizes thinking, not feeling. This is true in part. It is more accurate to say that theology begins with the mind and moves to

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the heart. Doing theology is the work of mind renewal for the purpose of heart transformation (Rom. 12:2). Christianity is not a religion of the mind only—some cold, dead, and dusty intellectual exercise. But neither is it a religion of the heart only—all emotion and fervor, and no reasoned belief.

Theology does not worship the life of the mind, but rather acknowledges that “the heart cannot love what the mind does not know.”³ Theology fails if it is an intellectual exercise only. Theology functions properly if an enlivened intellect fuels an enlivened heart. It recognizes the beauty of reason in the life of faith, and it gives to reason a vocabulary and a vision. Thinking deeply about God should always result in feeling deeply about God. Theology that does not lead to doxology (worship) is not theology at all, but a vain pursuit of knowledge. What’s the difference? The motive of the learner and the work of the Holy Spirit in applying what is learned.

So, is theology academic? It can be. But it is meant to be accessible to all disciples. Is theology impractical? Far from it. In fact, knowing and loving God well is the most practical thing in the world. Does theology lack feeling? Not at all. True theology always leads to loving and worshipping God.

What is theology? *Words about God.*

Who does theology? *Everybody.*

What does theology do? *It organizes biblical truths.*

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Why does theology matter? *Because living well matters.*

Simply put, theology is part of a life well lived. *Theology helps us live all of life well.*

How Do We Do Theology?

Where do we start? Theology is done *biblically, prayerfully, worshipfully, humbly, and together in community.*

First, theology must be *biblical*. The aim of Christian theology is to reflect on God's revelation of Himself in Scripture. Theology that is not a reflection of Scripture ceases to be Christian theology. Christian theologians pattern their words, thoughts, and worship around who God says He is and what He has done as revealed in Scripture. Disciples of Jesus never graduate from Scripture. We never move past it. We never get bored with it. Scripture is the lifeblood of theology. We return to Scripture over and over again, so that we may know and commune with God. He meets us there. He reveals Himself there. He speaks to us there. The Bible is our primary authority because in Scripture God makes Himself known to us.

Not only must theology be biblical, but it also must be *prayerful*. Theology begins and ends with prayer. The task of theology is best done on our knees, asking God, by the power of the Spirit, to awaken our hearts and minds to the person and work of Christ in the Scriptures. In prayer, we begin to

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see God and ourselves rightly. We have the opportunity to attend to God as our Creator and Redeemer, and we ask Him to help us, His creatures, with the task of theology. We ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate our darkened hearts and minds so we can know God truly. Prayerless theology is likely prideful intellectualism. We can't know God unless He makes Himself known to us, which is why we pray. In the matter of theological growth, let it never be said of us that we did not have because we did not ask.

Theology is also meant to be *worshipful*. It is not meant to make us love theology more, but to love God more. Theology is distinctly relational, not drearily informational. In current Christian subculture, it is sometimes reflected that knowledge just puffs up. Any intellectual expression of faith veers dangerously toward the example of the Pharisees. In short, too much thinking will kill worship. But theology and worship are not adversarial. They are two sides of the same coin. Theology is loving God with our minds. Theology is meant to lead us into greater worship of God, and worship of God is meant to lead us into greater knowledge of God. Doctrine and doxology fuel each other. Everything we learn about God should yield worship of God.

Theology is also meant to be a work of *humility*. Theologians never strut. Fundamentally, a disciple is a learner. Everything you have ever learned required humility in the process because anything worth learning requires practice to

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become proficient. With theology, we are doing more than simply learning a skill. We are humble theologians because we cannot know God unless He makes Himself known to us. All knowledge of God is given by God. It is an act of grace for God to make Himself known to us. To know God is to know grace. Therefore to know God is to grow in humility. There is no room for pride in theology. A prideful theologian is a contradiction of terms. All theology is meant to be marked by Spirit-driven humility. If your theology is leading you into pride, throw it away and get a better theology. If your theology is leading you to deeper humility, then keep pressing forward because you are being transformed into the image of Christ, which is the goal of all theology.

Last, but certainly not least, theology is not meant to be done alone but together, in *community*. And by community, we mean both our contemporary communities and the historic church. God has given you a context, a community, and relationships for a reason. God is calling you to engage theologically in your relationships. Spouses, brothers and sisters, parents and children, neighbors, and friends are called into the task of theology together.

In the context of the local church, we are able to learn about God from other people in our immediate setting, and they from us. There is no such thing as a lone-ranger theologian. When we do theology together, we are testifying to the God-ordained truth that we need one another. None of

WHY DOES THEOLOGY MATTER?

us is sufficient for the theological task as an individual, but when we come together to do theology, we learn from one another. Men, women, young, old, various socioeconomic backgrounds, and diverse ethnicities—we help one another by learning from one another.

In the context of the global church, we are able to learn about God from our contemporaries in widely different cultural settings than ours. Different life experiences contribute to different vantage points and lenses through which we see the Scriptures. We're all looking at the same beautiful gospel diamond, but brothers and sisters from different parts of the world, with different backgrounds, see different facets of the diamond with greater clarity. It benefits us to learn humbly from our siblings in Christ around the world.

In the context of the historic church, we are able to learn about God from our predecessors in widely different historic and cultural settings than ours. The Holy Spirit has been teaching, nourishing, and guiding the church into truth for the last two thousand years. It has been said that theology should be done with ancient friends. As we engage in theology, we are meant to learn from our brothers and sisters from the early church, from the medieval church, from the Reformation, up until today. When we invite our brothers and sisters from previous centuries into conversation with us, we invite God's wisdom from previous centuries into our lives. We learn that behind our theology lie centuries of both

wisdom and foolishness that we can learn from. When we do theology with our ancient friends, we are invited to learn from their wisdom and their mistakes. Doing theology with a historical mindset does not elevate tradition to the same level of authority of Scripture, but rather helps us understand Scripture through the lenses of church history.

Questions We Will Consider in This Book

If you've ever browsed the theology section of a Christian bookstore, you know the truth of the sentiment of Ecclesiastes 12:12: "There is no end to the making of many books." Many of those books are much thicker than the one you currently hold in your hands. That's because it's an introduction, a first step on the journey.

This book will not focus on every theological consideration helpful to the believer. Rather, it will discuss primary topics—the things Christians hold general agreement on. We call these topics *essentials*, or *first-tier doctrines*. They are the defining beliefs of Christianity, the core beliefs that distinguish Christianity from other belief systems and that mark the boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy. If you are familiar with the historic creeds of the church, you will not be surprised to see that this book follows the same pattern.

In an age marked by ignorance of essentials and division over nonessentials, we want to help you retrieve the doctrines

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that distinguish Christianity and that have done so for two thousand years.

The topics that we will address in this book will be phrased in the form of questions:

- Who is God? *The Doctrine of the Trinity*
- What is God like? *The Attributes of God*
- What is the Bible? *The Doctrine of Scripture*
- Who are we? *The Doctrine of Humanity*
- What went wrong? *The Doctrine of Sin*
- What has God done? *The Doctrines of Christology, Atonement, and Justification*
- To whom do we belong? *The Doctrine of the Church*
- How does the story end? *The Doctrine of Last Things*

Let's get started!

THEOLOGY CAN BE INTIMIDATING.

But it doesn't have to be. Whether conversations about theology have felt out of reach, over your head, or irrelevant, consider this book an invitation to the dialogue.

The goal of theology is knowing and loving God well. This is a lifelong endeavor, a never-ending pursuit, not for the sake of knowledge, but for an ever-deepening relationship with God Himself. Authors Jen Wilkin and J. T. English invite you to become not merely a consumer of theology, but a contributor to the conversation, and to grow in faithfulness to the Great Commission's call to make disciples.

You are a theologian.

You Are a Theologian addresses theological questions such as:

- **Who is God?** *The Doctrine of the Trinity*
- **What is God like?** *The Attributes of God*
- **What is the Bible?** *The Doctrine of Scripture*
- **Who are we?** *The Doctrine of Humanity*
- **What went wrong?** *The Doctrine of Sin*
- **What has God done?** *The Doctrines of Christology, Atonement, and Justification*
- **To whom do we belong?** *The Doctrine of the Church*
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