



218: A Story of Discernment with Jamin Goggin

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 218.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing. Today's question, what do you do when you work hard on something for years of your life, you believe you're being faithful to your next right thing, and then you release your prayed for work into the world only to later learn new information that forces you to question everything you worked so hard to offer.

My guest today had to ask and wrestle with that very question. Jamin Goggin is the co-author along with Kyle Strobel of the book, *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb, Searching for Jesus Path of Power in a Church That Has Abandoned It*. I look forward to talking with Jamin about what compelled him to want to write a book about power in the church in the first place and how it applies to cultural conversations we're having today. And I'll also invite him to tell the story about his own discernment process of why they chose to stop printing the first edition of this book when the very message they wrote about, the dangers of the abuse of power, came to light in new and heartbreaking ways. Listen in.

Emily:

Well, I met Jamin in 2016 when he served as a spiritual director and a guide for a writing retreat that John and I participated in. So we've known each other now for about six years. And in that time, Jamin has been to our house, has met our kids, they still talk about how cool Jamin from California is. We've been to Jamin's church out in California. So we've been grateful, Jamin, for your friendship and love over the years, and now I'm so glad to have you on the podcast.

Jamin Goggin:

Well, it is a joy to be with you.

Emily:

Well, it's always a joy. I want you just right here at the top for the listener who might be hearing about you for the very first time. Can you tell us just a little bit about you, your work and what makes you come most fully alive?

Jamin:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, other than hanging out with the Freemans and playing pickup basketball in the street in front of the Freemans house, which is definitely a joy for me.

Emily:
Yeah that's a joy.

Jamin:
Yes. I hail from north San Diego county. So sunny Southern California. I've been down in San Diego now for about six years, pastoring a church here called Mission Hills, but I'm an Orange County boy, born and raised. So for those that kind of know, Southern California a little bit, Orange County's just north up the five, as we like to say in California about our freeways, the five, and the 405.

Emily:
You call your freeways the way I call the Goodwill.

Jamin:
Yeah, totally, totally. Oh man. So born and raised in Orange County, been a pastor for many years, but moved down here becoming a pastor at Mission Hills, like I said, about six years ago. And so I've been in pastoral ministry for nearly, goodness, I'm bad with timing, but nearly 18 years now, I believe. And love to serve the local church. Love to proclaim God's word, shepherd God's people, be with them in their journey. And of course, local pastoral ministry provides the opportunity to do that. So for me, that's really the heart of my vocation, but I do feel part of my vocation as well is writing and expressing kind of my pastoral vocation through the written word, as well as doing spiritual retreats and kind of providing spiritual direction.

So some of my seminary training and education, I have two MAs and a PhD, but my, one of my MAs is in spiritual formation, soul care, and a big part of that master's degree program was training as a spiritual director and training in spiritual retreats and experiencing spiritual retreats. So that's always been kind of another component of my vocation and outlet and expression. So you guys coming in on the Tuscany retreat a few years ago, me doing that work there, that is definitely a passion for me. So other than the local church, writing, leading spiritual retreats, caring for souls in those contexts, those things, to use your language, are definitely places where I come alive.

And lastly, I think, but most importantly, a husband to Kristen and father of four children and we homeschool, so Kristen definitely takes the lion's share of that responsibility. She has her credential and she's an educator by heart, but I try to help out as best I can as well. So being a dad, in the thick of it with four kids still in the house, life is full and busy in the best way possible.

Emily:
You started to co-write a book with Kyle Strobel about power and you started it, if I got my dates right, back in 2010, and that eventually came out in 2017. So that's about a seven year runway.

Jamin:
Yes.

Emily:
No shame. I appreciate the research it took to do this book. The book, by the way is called *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*. And you say that the underlying problem behind nearly every major issue confronting the church is power, and the way you just shared, you're a pastor, so I imagine you have a front row seat to this, Jamin, you wrote this book, I just want to mention, just to put this in context, before the initial iterations of the Black Lives Matter movement, before the pandemic, before the podcast, *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*, before the many scandals that we've seen rock the church in the past few years. Was an incident back in 2010 that compelled you and Kyle to dive into this topic?

Jamin:

Yeah, well, I think your setting of the context is helpful, but the first release of the book, as you said, was pre so many, even Church Too and the Me Too movement, I guess so any expressions within the culture more broadly and within the church where questions about power were being asked and concerns are being raised and for Kyle and I, my co-author, I would say really the inciting kind of incident, if you will, was really what God was doing in our own lives. And I think probably narrating a little bit of my own story is probably the right answer.

I went to seminary when I was a young man out of a Bible college with grandiosity in my heart and desire to be great, and my vision of ministry involved me on a large stage, preferably lined with screens that would make my image even larger and a room full of people hanging on my every word. And my visions of ministry didn't include sitting a bedside with an elderly woman who was dying and the quiet solace and pain of a hospital room. Didn't include navigating challenging marital dynamics between a husband and wife and my church and long hours of counseling and painful conversation. Didn't even really involve the hard work of preparing for that sermon on stage and that 20 to 25 hours of sitting with text and allowing scripture to interpret my own heart and my own life. Right?

So much of my vision for ministry was about being great and about having a platform and having recognition, being significant, being acknowledged kind of on the broader evangelical landscape, if you will. And I think a couple things happened for me. One was through the process of seminary and doing two master's degrees and some of what I already described in my seminary experience included therapy, included receiving spiritual direction, included spiritual retreats. And so much of that for me, was really fodder for beginning to see this in my own heart.

And coupled with that was a consistent confrontation, consistently was being confronted with Jesus and things that Jesus said that were really unfortunate for my plan. Things like the first will be last and last will be first and don't seek the seats of honor and my grace is sufficient for you, for my powers made perfect in weakness. And all these things that ran so contrary to my kind of vision for ministry and what I thought it meant to become a pastor. And so I think so, so much of those kind of seminary years and early years of ministry, I began to see some of this quest for power in my own heart, and I began to recognize that my vision for ministry ran in many ways, quite contrary Jesus's vision for ministry and the kingdom. And I think the last piece in this was along my kind of upward ascent as a young pastor, and I was asked to be an elder at a church, I think when I was 24 years old.

Emily:

Wow.

Jamin:

Yeah, I was being asked to preach much more in the quote big church, right? As a youth pastor being asked to teach other Bible study classes, I was being brought into certain circles with just more broadly within kind of the ministry world and network of kind of evangelical ministry world, where I was bumping shoulders with those who were publishing and running conferences and being given opportunities. And it was right in the midst of that kind of upward ascent that I lost my first job in ministry, and the church was struggling financially. Couldn't continue to really afford my salary along with many salaries, but that sent me in kind of in this kind of final turn into the truth of my hearts.

And as I kind of languished in unemployment and felt the sting of being disconnected from this vocation, I felt really called to what the Lord really did during that time for me was revealed how much this kind of drive for significance in power and recognition was really driving so much of my heart in ministry up to that point. And it was a true calling and there was much in my heart that was ordered rightly in that calling, to be sure, but he was showing me what was really going on underneath. And so that season for

me of being out of work, that kind of, as I launched back into ministry and I got my next job in ministry, that several year period is what really led into this now seven year journey of writing a book on power and weakness in the church.

So the driver was not here's something I figured out, let me tell everybody about it. The driver was not, oh, I've arrived. I now know exactly how to hold power in ministry the right way. Let me let everybody know my secret now as an early 30 year old, but really it was wow, Lord, I now see how much of my heart has been grasping for a way of power that's antithetical to Jesus and his cross. I want to pursue Jesus' way. And I'm not quite sure what that looks like. And so, so much of the writing in the book was a journey. That's why it took seven years, a journey of seeking out the way of Jesus, the way of kingdom power, the way of power formed by his cross. And so, as you know, maybe we'll get into this a bit, but so much of the book was then going on kind of a literal pilgrimage, going and seeking out those that along with my co-author, I felt embodied a different way of power in ministry that had real impact in the kingdom. People that had, I think, had real impact in the kingdom, and yet who seemed to choose a different way than this way of power I had been on.

Emily:

I'm curious, I'm glad you mentioned that, because I would love to hear you just say a little bit about the format of the book. Not because format is always important in a book necessarily, but I think in your book specifically, it's really relevant to the conversation as how you and Kyle decided to lay the book out and who you decided to talk with.

Jamin:

Yeah. The idea was not that we would write a book as experts on power, but that we would be honest about our own struggles and temptations as I just have, and honest about what we also saw in the church. I think coupled with everything I just shared, what I would say is the advice, the conferences, the guidance for that kind of previous way of power of seeking platform and significance and influence, and kind of leveraging a church for one's own kind of brand, the advice and conferences and guidance for that way were in my estimation kind of legion in the church. This was a way of power that was not kind of a unique temptation to me, but I saw it all around me. And so really what Kyle and I, my co-author, recognized was we needed to find folks that embodied this other way of power, that we saw Jesus commending to us in scripture and that he had been kind of confronting us with in our own lives. We needed to find those who are kind of sages of that way, who might show us what it would look like.

And so, yeah, the format of the book then was kind of ordered around that literal pilgrimage. So we spent several years of those seven years of the writing three or four of those years traveling and visiting with people. So Dallas Willard, Marva Don, John Perkins, James Huston, Eugene Peterson, and then John Vanier, we'll talk a little bit about later, but these were folks that not only wrote on and spoke about this question of kind of power in the church, but whose lives as best we could tell kind of embodied the way of Jesus. So we traveled and we sat with these folks in their living rooms or at coffee shops and we explored what it might look like to pursue the way of Jesus in ministry and what his way of power might I actually look like.

And so the format of the book then kind of really was shaped around this journey. So it's kind of us narrating our travels. And then if you dive into the book, you'll see this, that each of these kind of figures, kind of sages of the way had their own particular area of interest or emphasis that then kind of shaped or formed different themes for each chapter. Now, John Perkins, talking to him about reconciliation and racism in the church and kind of systemic evil and how we identify that in the church and how we name that as an evil power. And so each of these figures kind of provided different wisdom or kind of unique insights to different themes as they connect to power, the question of power.

Emily:

You had such a unique experience. It's one thing to read about you having those conversations, but it's a whole nother thing for you to be in the room with these leaders and these people who many of us have read and learned from for so many years, what would we be most surprised to know from your perspective as someone sitting face to face with Dallas Willard before he died, or with the Marva Don or John Perkins?

Jamin:

Yeah. Great question. By way of answering that question, maybe one thing would be helpful to say too at this point, because I've been assuming this already with so much of what I've been saying, for those that haven't read the book and might be listening to this, just to clarify, the kind of major argument of our book is that there are two ways of power available to us, and the book we name these as the way of the dragon or the way of the lamb. To use the language from scripture though, this is the way from above or the way from below as James will say in James II, this is the way of wisdom or the way of folly, right? We see these two ways narrated throughout all of scripture and the way we de delineate or distinguish between those two ways is their source and their tell off.

So in other words, where they come from and what they're for, and we argue that the way of the dragon or the way of from below or the way of folly or the way of flesh, to use biblical language, is the way of power and strength for the sake of control or domination. And that the way of the lamb or the way from above, the way of wisdom, the way of the spirit, is power in weakness for the sake of love. So the idea here is not that actually, as Christians, we're called to kind of eschew all power. This is actually one of the temptations I think when faced with toxic power in the church, abusive power in the church, which has been a major topic of conversation in recent months, like connected to the podcast, that's been wildly popular, *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* and other conversations that have surfaced in life of the church more broadly in recent months, as we see leaders that fall, one of the temptations is to kind of say, well, power's all by bad, right?

But what scripture actually offers us is a different answer. That there's a way of power that is actually faithful, that we're called to in the kingdom, this way of the lamb, power in weakness for the sake of love. And I share all of that, not just to provide some framework for what's already been said, but by way of answering your question, I think what, what I saw in these folks, Dallas Willard, Marva Don, Eugene Peterson, uniformly, was a continued embrace of their weakness and a willingness to be vulnerable, and I think what really struck me about my time with them was, yes, these were kind of sages on this way of power in weakness for the sake of love. Those who had for 50, 60, 70 years of their life embraced Jesus' way of the cross and whose lives really bore the fruit of that.

But they were folks who had not arrived nor viewed themselves as having arrived. And so as much as they were sages, as much as they had wisdom to offer in their eighties and in their nineties, in some cases, and the folks we spent time with, and by the way, most of these folks have since passed away since we wrote the book and what really struck me about their lives, the way they talked about their lives was now in their later years, discovering in new ways, frailties, weaknesses, fears, insecurities, vulnerabilities in their life and learning yet still what it meant to meet God there, to know the power of Christ in that place. To use Paul's language in Corinthians, to know what it means that God's power would rest in this place and to listen to Marva Don talk about her continued physical ailments, and now her inability to travel and speak as she was used to doing and learning and newer and deeper ways, what it meant to depend and trust on God. Listening to GI Packer talk about his recent hip surgery and saying things like I'm learning in a new way what it means, it is powers made perfect in my weakness.

And so what I saw in these folks was a commitment to embrace the way of Jesus to kind of be open to their frailty, to be open and vulnerable before the Lord in their own weakness, in their inabilities, in their insufficiency, and to meet God there and to know him more deeply. I think that was one thing that

uniformly stood out to me about their lives. And lastly, what I'll say is this, I can say it briefly, despite all the concern about the church, and there was great concern about the church embracing that way from below, embracing the way of the dragon, trying to kind of wield demonic power, as we would say in our book, to achieve kingdom ends, this is the real temptation in the church is to believe that our ends justify our means, right? As long as we have good kingdom goals in mind, we want to see people get saved, we want to share the gospel. It doesn't matter how we get there, right?

And to every one of them, there was a concern about that. And yet, despite all of that concern and real criticism, there was an abiding joy that the spirit was on the move, that despite all the concerns, despite all the challenges or the problems and evangelicalism as they saw them, that there was a real joy and a real hope tied to Christ's faithfulness, that he was going to accomplish his purposes, that he was going to build his church. And so what I didn't see in them was a sense of resignation or defeat, but real hope and joy, even though they spoke very sober mindedly about concerns they had.

Emily:

Well, coincidentally, so that you mentioned before, there were two additions, there are two additions of the book. The first edition released on the day Donald Trump was sworn into office, which I only mention because I don't think anyone would argue that the office of the President of the United States is one that the world agrees is a powerful position. And so I could imagine the conversations on your book launch day, even in that week, seemed extremely relevant, even though your book is about power in the church. But I'm curious if you remember during that time in the early days of that first edition, were there other things happening in the cultural moment, even among the church, again, this was 2017, which was a really different time than where we are now, but around that, the release of the book specifically in the church, what conversations were you having with people about the concepts in the book?

Jamin:

Yeah, I think in many probably who are listening as podcasts are aware of maybe more recent stories of fallen leaders. Obviously the Mars Hill podcast kind of brought back into our collective consciousness, that story, but it's not actually not a real news story. We actually discussed some of those realities about Mars Hill in the original edition of our book. But I think maybe Ravi Zacharias would be another recent story of a leader that has long been looked to for gospel wisdom and faithfulness and whose life has been actually been revealed to be painfully duplicitous in some deeply sinister and sinful ways. I share those more immediate examples that are kind of in our collective consciousness, simply as a way of saying, I would say within the year that our book came out, there were many other stories just like that, we just may not remember them right now.

Within that first year there, there was what happened with Mars Hill was happening then actually. Within a couple years, within a year or two years of the book first releasing, there were, I would say a significant number of very prominent pastors who not only had large churches, but who were writing books, who were the headline speakers at all the big conferences. And if you were to go back then now and look at the year before our book released, and I don't know where you could even find this, but it'd be interesting to do, if you could go back and look at a couple of the larger Christian conferences, particularly pastoral, ministry related conferences in that year. I think you would find that a significant number of the kind of plenary session speakers are folks who have since had to resign from their position in ministry or been removed from ministry for one reason or another.

And so I think those prominent stories, while I don't think they're, and this is one of the concerns I have at times is I don't think they are somehow unique in evangelicals. In other words, I think there are many other stories like that just, the level of celebrity or notoriety doesn't make CT's homepage or doesn't get shared on Twitter. But these stories I think are legion. In other words, there are many other stories of other pastors or others in ministry that just aren't heard or more localized.

But nonetheless, I think those stories, I think how prominent they were and how many there were, my sense was in conversation with folks in that year or two following the book release was what those stories were doing was kind of maybe kind of waking us up to is something wrong here? Did something go wrong? Because these are all the people we're listening to, these are the people writing the books and speaking at the conferences, and yet they're having major moral failures. Right?

Emily:
Yeah.

Jamin:
And if nothing else, the question now is being asked, what's going on? And I think what I would say is I think our book does, I think hopefully help provide some wisdom in answering that question well.

Emily:
And it matters because of what happened next for you in your writing work. I will never forget the day my phone rang, and it was you on the other line. And this bears telling that the book was never meant to have two editions. There was the one edition, and that was the plan. But we do have two editions, and I remember you called me that day and I'm curious if you'd be willing to share a bit about what led up to that phone call and what we talked about in that phone call.

Jamin:
Yeah. Yeah. Boy, we had just finished our first kind of retreat conference connected to the book we called *Way of the Lamb*. And it would've been a couple days of really just joyful ministry. We had over a hundred kind of pastors, ministry leaders, folks leaning into this question of what does it mean to embrace Jesus's way of power in ministry? And what does it mean to know his strength in my weakness, not wield my personality to accomplish ministry ends, not use the church for my own platform. Two days of pastors confessing sins to one other, praying over one, it was just a beautiful thing. And myself and Kyle kind of spoke at this along with Scott Sauls, a friend in ministry, Ann Voskamp. It just was a rich time.

And so I was coming off of this, just thanking the Lord. I remember going home after the second day and just feeling so full of joy and gratitude for what God had done. And it was that night, that night I did something I actually don't usually do. And I looked on Twitter and I don't remember who initially or what initially brought it up, but I saw on Twitter comments about John Vanier, one of these figures we had interviewed in our book, we traveled all the way to France to spend time with John Vanier. For those that are listening to maybe don't know who he is, just a little bit of context is helpful. John Vanier started the Arch Communities, which is really a worldwide network of communities that care for those with mental and physical disabilities. No one has been more significant in modern history in caring for those with disabilities than John Vanier.

And for those that maybe know Henri Nouwen, John was Henri Nouwen's mentor. Henry's book, *The Road to Daybreak* is about going to Daybreak, one of these communities. Much of Henry's later writing was about ministering in a large community. And so, at any rate, the news was kind of breaking on Twitter and you never know what that really means initially, right? And we ought to be cautious with that or circumspect about that. But I started to see these kind of posts about something coming out about Vanier, and he had died not long prior to this. And so as I continued to read, I came across a couple articles and some that were directly connected to Arch and some that were about an internal investigation that had happened that was now being made public. And much to my horror, what was being revealed was that he had abused at least a few women under his spiritual care and not those in mental, physical disabilities, but others who had come to him for spiritual guidance as a spiritual director.

And this stories were absolutely horrifying, incredibly painful to read about, deeply grievous, just really evil behavior and abusing those who had sought you out for care and incredibly vulnerable moment. And

I called Kyle right away, we processed it that night, kind of sat on the phone late into the night, silently reading, having a hard time speaking. And so, yeah, it was the next day I think that Kyle and I had a conversation early on in the day in which we decided we needed to do something about this, but we didn't know what, and here we have a book out where this person is kind of one of these sages that we're putting forward to the church, as someone who represents Jesus' way of power, and yet this person has so radically chosen evil power and abusive, toxic power.

And we didn't know what that meant. This book is out. What does that mean? What do we do? And, and so, yeah, I remember calling you and John and calling a couple friends and just seeking wisdom and really with this question that your podcast so wonderfully helps frame, which is what's the next right thing for us to do? And so through prayer and through seeking wise council, friends that are trusted, who also knew the publishing world and how it worked, because part of my question was what can we do? I don't even know what the options are here, and what would a publisher be receptive to and what do we have even available to us and what we decided through much prayer and conversation and seeking counsel was we needed to pull the book from the shelf and we need to at least request that of the publisher, that the right thing to do in honoring these direct victims of his abuse was to not put him forward or put his words forward or his wisdom forward as someone who represented Jesus's way when he did not.

That was the caring thing to do for these direct victims. That was a first importance is what would honor the direct victims, what would they want? What would it mean to love and care for them well? And then secondly, what does it mean to have integrity with our book going forward? To have this person in there represented the way that they are given the message of our book and what does it mean to have that person alongside of others who have represented the way of Jesus faithfully? Right. What does it mean for John Vanier to still be put alongside Marva Don and Eugene Peterson as somehow kind of a peer of theirs, that doesn't feel honoring of them either. So for all those reasons, the right thing to do was to pull the book, but we didn't know beyond that if the publisher would give us an opportunity, and to their credit, I mean, they responded so well.

They heard our concern, they shared our concern, I think for the right reasons. And it was not convenient. It was not financially a strategy they had in mind for the book, but they were willing to meet us in the sacrifice that was required to not only pull the book from publishing, but they also offered us an opportunity to rerelease the book. And so then came to the question, well, what does that mean? Do we just, do we just remove him in the chapter and pretend like he wasn't there? Do we take an opportunity to, and you know this well, Emily, any author always can find more words, so, oh, hey, is this the opportunity to write four more chapters, I've always wanted to write. And so I think the process of discernment and prayer there really led us to, you know, what feels faithful here is yes to remove him, but to not pretend like this didn't happen and to do what we've done with the book from the beginning, which is to be honest about our own journey.

And so we removed the chapter, but we wrote a whole new chapter that basically narrated this story. And here's what happened to us. This person was in the original edition of the book. Here's why they're not, and really to take a few months and kind of process our own temptations and how we responded that. I mean, one of the temptations is to kind of second guess yourself, and go back in your mind. Oh, was there a tell I missed? Was there something that happened that I should have noticed? What was there one word that was said, and I should have keyed on it and I should have known this about this person? That's one of the temptations. And so kind of trying to name that a bit, some of the temptations we faced. There's a temptation to kind of mull over it in your mind a lot to read and reread Twitter posts and articles about it, and kind of, for lack of a better way of putting it, to kind of wrestle with it in your mind and try to make sense of it, but actually never move to God and prayer with it.

Emily:
Yeah.

Jamin:

So what does it mean for us to actually meet God in our lament to cry out to him, to actually pray prayers of implication, like Lord do something about this injustice. We're angry about it. We're upset about it. We feel embarrassed that this happened. This was part of our book. And, but to move those emotions, the pain, the anger, the hurt, the embarrassment, into prayer, not just to kind of stay in my own mind about it or to kind of read and reread things about it.

Emily:

Yes. I'm glad you say that, Jamin, because it's definitely something that you could spin out quickly and often into sort of a guru search of like, well, what do they think we should do? Or what do they think we should do? What are they saying? And kind of this guessing and second guessing. For so many reasons, both the book itself, the reader you want to care for, the other people, like you said, who you set forth as people to listen to when it comes to people who walk in the way of Jesus and then just not to mention the victims of the abuse, not to mention, but number one, and I'm glad you mentioned that first, but there were so many things to consider. And this is an interesting nuanced and heartbreaking example of when your next right thing, your next deeply right thing is incredibly inconvenient.

It is heartbreaking. It hurts. And then there may not be a really clear like, oh, well here's what you do when this happens, is here's the next step. And I think there are so many decisions like that in life that we often face. Yours is extremely unique. I can't think of very many authors who have faced this type of decision, but I think it is universally relatable in that we can be confronted with something that we put so much time and effort into, so much thought and prayer, and I think this is what a lot of times, especially Christians who want to hear the voice of God and then you question, did we not hear God, right? And I'm curious if you struggled with that at all when you made your initial decision to write this book and to interview these particular people and we felt led, the spirit was leading us in a certain way. And now what does it say about us that we were led here? And as it turns out, this wasn't a match, this wasn't what we thought it was.

Jamin:

Yes. I think that's well said. Oh man, the flurry of emotions was profound. And now I can say that I'm grateful for the whole process and the whole journey, but boy, initially yeah, this is one of those rare experiences writing where the first edition of the book I felt like was, this is exactly what I would want it to be. Oh, I would never want to touch it again. It was like one of the rare things I've ever written where I felt like this is exactly what it ought to be.

Emily:

Finally. I said what I wanted to say.

Jamin:

Yeah. And, and not because I couldn't turn a better sentence or two, but it just felt like God had been so in it, and to your point, the journey of spending time with each of these folks and how that happened. And even with John Vanier is a good example. I mean, we didn't have the money to travel to France to do this. Someone else, and without going into specifics, one of the other sages we interviewed for the book actually financed our ability to travel and go, even spend time with John Vanier because that other person felt that John Vanier was such an important addition to the book after we had shared our desire to spend time with him.

And so, well, how do you make sense of that? Felt like the Lord had made a way and God's Providence, here we were. And getting to interview these people, many of whom died within just a couple years of the book being published and getting that opportunity before they passed away. And so you're right, I think so much was hard about it, but now, it's an important part of the story. Maybe what I'll just say in closing

about that is this, I think one of the things that things like the Mars Hill podcast I think has helped to do is maybe raise our awareness of toxic forms of power in the church and the dangers of things like celebrity. But I do think one of the things we still struggle with is to know how to name these forms of power well, particularly in their more subtle expressions. And what I would say is, to be frank, Mars Hill just is a rather loud example of some very kind of obvious narcissism and abuses of power.

And I don't want to diminish the challenge of discerning that in the moment for those who are involved in the story. But I think when you hear the story, how the way this person spoke, the way they carried themselves, and what I would say is sometimes wolves just look like wolves. We just want wolves in the church, and that's something that we have to reckon with. I think the Lord's calling us to reckon with. But sometimes wolves really do look like sheep, and that's one of the real challenges. And I think one of the things this experience with Vanier surfaced that I think we can maybe help people navigate in the new chapter of the book, because we do try to explore this, is how do you discern that well? Because the truth of Vanier was he was gentle. He was gracious. His presence was incredibly tender.

He was content with being tucked away and hidden in a French village and not really being noticed. He wasn't seeking a big platform. He didn't have a kind of domineering personality and presence. When you were with him, he was very gracious and warm and kind and tender hearted. And yet he was doing these things, right? And so I think Jesus tells us this, right? Wolves will come in sheep's clothing. Well then how on earth do we identify them, Lord? Right? When they don't actually look like a wolf, when they're not obviously biting, when they're not just roaming around growling all the time, but they look gentle and kind and gracious. And I think maybe the reason why this journey, I think for us, can serve the church well is we were really forced to wrestle with that and wrestle with, yeah. How do we discern that?

And did we miss something? And what happens when you can't discern it? And what happens when only the Lord sees what's really going on in someone's heart and how do we navigate that? And are there other things that we can pay attention to that are more subtle? Does this mean we ought to give up on all of our leaders and never look to anyone for guidance, right? Because that's another temptation. I'll just forget it, I just won't listen to anybody. I think that is so much of people's experience. Right? And at some point in their Christian life, they're going to bump up against that with a pastor, with a mentor, with a writer, with a speaker, with someone that they've trusted. So I think in God's providence and kindness, I think ultimately it is a good addition to the book that I think will be a blessing to people in much of what they genuinely struggle with.

Emily:

Jamin, I want to thank you for entering into this conversation with candor and honesty and revealing some of those things that I think we can, while we may not relate specifically to your experience in writing of this book, and then the subsequent edition that had to be added, so many of us can relate to having been hurt, maybe feeling like a fool, like we were duped or being hesitant to trust again. And I think you have eloquently and kindly helped to put that at least in some perspective for us as we move forward in discerning our next right thing in love, even when there's things that we don't know and can't see in doing that with some faith. I'm going to ask you one final question that I ask all guests who come on The Next Right Thing, I'm sure you could guess it, Jamin, what is your next right thing?

Jamin:

Great final question. And I didn't guess it, even though I probably really should have, right?

Emily:

Maybe if I would've given you a second, you could have guessed it.

Jamin:

Yeah. Yeah. Oh boy. My next right thing is embracing in this season of my life yet still the abiding

invitation of the Lord to know his strength and my weakness. And for me, to be very vulnerable and candid with everyone who's listening, I'm coming off of illness, coming off of COVID finally catching me and my life. And one of my real struggles is I'm a high productive, want to get things done, want to feel accomplished kind of guy. I really struggle with being sick and I really struggle with resting and I really struggle with actually allowing myself to rest. And in that there's an invitation of a Lord. Oh, Jamin, once again, what does it mean for you to know here that you're weak and that you need me and that's a good thing, not a bad thing. So that's my next right thing.

Emily:
Amen. Thanks so much, Jamin.

Jamin:
Thank you.

Thanks for listening to episode 218 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of learning to walk in the way of Jesus can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because while it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions, you know the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are making our lives. As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram at [emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). And you can find my guest today, Jamin Goggin on Twitter @JaminGoggin, that's J-A-M-I-N G-O-G-G-I-N. You can also find him online metamorpha.com where you can find out more about the revised and updated version of the book he co-wrote with Kyle Strobel. It was the catalyst for our Next Right Thing conversation today, The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb. In the book, they attempt to answer the question, what does Jesus' way of power really look like?

Special thanks to the team at Unmutable for their faithful editing of this podcast, especially Jessica for helping with our interviews, and Kam for his relentless patience with my editorial request, and to Leah Jarvis for her faithful work in the show notes. In closing, a few words from Jamin's book.

“Jesus was grounded in an unhurried existence that allowed him to present, to listen carefully and faithfully, to overflow and mercy, grace, and love. And to know his calling and refuse to be seduced by callings that were not his or callings not done according to his way. Jesus' heart was formed and abiding with his father in his times of silence and solitude seeking the father's will, in his continued dependence and obedience, and counterintuitively in his suffering.”

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.