



The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication

Justin Wise

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How often have you talked about “reaching people where they are”—and realized that much of the time, they are on the Internet?

We’ve been living in a digital world for quite a while now. Justin Wise speaks about social media as this generation's printing press—a revolutionary technology that can spread the gospel farther and faster than we can imagine.

It’s time to take what we know (and admit what we don’t know) and learn together how to move forward as the church. Are you ready to think theologically about this digital age and reach people in a new way?

The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication Details

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From Reader Review The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication for online ebook

David says

Justin Wise is a person and personality in communication leadership I have looked up to for many years now. Watching him on Twitter helped me improve how I used Twitter!

His book, The Social Church, is unique in the respect of not being a how to, but being a why you should book and backing that up both with theology and communication theory. This makes the book highly unique in its kind.

I highly recommend the book to senior pastors, youth and college pastors, and to social media peoples at churches and nonprofits. It is one thing to post and produce content, it is something entirely different to know why you are doing it and making that why work for you to reach more people with the social media of our time...and to do it for the great Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Wayne Wrzesinski says

Justin does a great job of helping you wrap your head around the world of social media and the church. This book is not about "how to" or "this is your next strategy for getting likes and comments on your posts" but it looks at the why of social media. He uses stories of his failures and success throughout the book for us to learn from and grow alongside him. It's a book that I'll read once through and then will definitely keep handy to go back over and read some of the notes and highlighted sections.

The printing press changed how the world communicated and interacted with the written word. In today's fast pace world the way that humans are communicating and interacting is changing rapidly and the church needs to find ways to communicate with its members and the world around them. We are not changing the message. Think of how silly it would have been to say "no thanks, we don't need to use the printing press to produce Bibles, they've always been hand-copied and that works for us", I think the same is true for churches not using social media to connect with their audience.

Shaun Lee says

Being a millennial, the first portion of the book was quite a challenge to read through, because I could not really appreciate the dialogue of how the world was like before our modern day digital communications (at least not as well as the boomers). Yes I grew up with dial up internet and Compact Discs (CDs), but I felt that too many pages were committed to setting the stage for the primary substantives to come later. Initially I guessed that Justin Wise's primary audience was targeted at the latter group.

But I was so WRONG! The content started to get really interesting towards the end, where I felt that finally Justin is writing to me as well! And he provided some really valuable and sagely advice for us eager tech-savvy youngsters who feel that our tech-handicapped church leaders ought to go online. What would that be? I highlight recommend that you purchase the book (or borrow it) to find out! The couple of chapters towards the end of the book swayed me toward increasing the stars from 3 to 4. What then could make this a 5 star

book? Perhaps for future revisions, the front material could be edited for brevity, and have a final product of 100 pages (down from the current 180).

I received this book from the Moody Publishers Newsroom program for the purposes of providing an unbiased review. All views are my own.

Emily Mills says

Excellent book!

[Read my review here](#)

Barry says

I wavered greatly in how to rate this book. There are beneficial aspects of this book, and there are parts that are lacking. I'll get to each in turn, but the deciding factor in my rating came when I glanced again at the cover of the book as it sat beside my computer. The subtitle of this book is "A theology of digital communication." One of my criticisms of this book is the *lack* of theology (telling people how to do church without consulting the Bible - is that a good idea?), so the subtitle tipped the balance in favor of fewer stars.

Beneficial points: 1) Mr. Wise drives home his point that society and culture have changed, and will continue to change, in favor of technology, computers, the internet, and social media. 2) Because of this, the church must change and adapt not only to new technology, but to changes in society and culture brought on by the changes in technology. 3) Mr. Wise gives sound advice in saying that churches need to have a Big Idea in order for their social media program to work. He ties this in with the overall vision of the church, saying that without a unifying Big Idea the church will bounce around worthlessly. More or less. 4) This is a thought-provoking read. Mr. Wise brings up several good points to consider, and I can see this book being very provocative in a church leadership meeting.

Weak points: 1) Where's the Bible? Toward the end of the book I finally figured out the niggling negative thought that was gnawing at me: this book is like Purpose Driven Church, but from a tech standpoint. I get that psychology and sociology play roles in church growth, development, and psyche, but should they supplant the Word of God? Mr. Wise throws in a few Scriptures, but never does he develop an actual theology like his cover states. The verses he uses are single verses ripped from their original context and used to support his ideas on why the church must adapt tech or die. Further, instead of really trying to develop a Biblical theology he just waves around his MDiv to add "support" to his "theology". 2) Mega-church bias. Mr. Wise writes this book with the underlying assumption that all churches are, or should be, mega churches. How underlying is this? It's so underlying that he doesn't even mention it. Yet to pull off the kind of social media presence that he is talking about would require either a) a large church to pull volunteers from (or create a paid position, as he alludes to several times), or b) a highly unusual small church in which most of the members are well-versed in digital communication. 3) Where is the Holy Spirit? This point probably belongs in the Purpose Driven critique, but nowhere in this book does he write about the role of the Holy Spirit enlivening a church, its preaching, or its ministry. The role of the Holy Spirit has been replaced with social media. That's a crass interpretation - one that Mr. Wise would no doubt take offense to - but from an objective perspective, if there is no Holy Spirit at work in the church, what is actually behind church health, life, and growth? In his defense, Mr. Wise would likely argue that he is simply writing about digital communication and not the nuts and bolts of church ministry. 4) Editing. The overuse of parenthesis got to

me. As did the humor that felt forced and was mostly distracting.

The Social Church is a thought-provoking book that is sure to generate discussion, much needed discussion, inside of church leadership circles. This is a good thing, and ought to help the Body discern where, when, and how to use digital communication inside and outside of the Body. Mr. Wise has done a fine job of raising awareness about the importance of the digital world and the necessity of the church adapting to the changes. Though he falls short of writing a true theology of digital communication, this book is worth the read for its discussion value alone. Don't read it as a theology, but read it to be challenged.

I received this book free through Goodreads book giveaway program. Other than the free book, I received nothing in return for this review.

Seth Pierce says

This book has a lot of great information and insight, sadly it is not as scholarly as it could be. While the author maintains a light tone that is appreciated, his humor is sometimes lengthy when all the reader wants is to get to the point. I also felt there were several moments of theological/historical showboating, where the author describes well known church history, or theological issues, as though a reader of theological works wouldn't be familiar with them. This could be due to a fuzzy target audience.

Still, he does offer valuable insights based of McLuhan's mantra "the medium is the message"--and is able to make several good technological critiques, even if he is a little over excited about the use of new media.

Overall it's good, but could be better. Worth a read as a starting place, not an end point.

Shay says

The Social Church has some great principles for interacting with new media as the church. The idea that new media is to our generation what the printing press is to Martin Luther is helpful. As well, his treatment of social media as a relational tool is well put and fair.

Since this is a self-proclaimed theological treatment of new media, I do have a few theological concerns with how Justin Wise views kingdom work and what the role of the local church is. It would seem he almost views the local church as just a visual community and not a champion of the Truth of God's Word. When the church is no longer a champion of Truth, then seeing it as simply a real life community is easy. But that's not how Scripture reveals the work of the church. The focus of Scripture is that the church (yes, the local church) is a defender and proclaimer of the truth. I felt that Justin Wise doesn't give fair balance to the topic and almost has a disdain for what he calls the "middle-aged white male" who may be preaching in many of our churches.

I think you have to weigh Justin's Lutheran theology and find balance as to what is worth using and what is just bad theology. I appreciate the book for some initial thoughts on new media, but by no means is this book a good theological resource on the topic.

Justin Wise says

That author is really, very handsome.

Scott Guillory says

I have mixed feelings about the ideas presented in this book. Social Church's main idea is that churches must embrace the digital world to be able to speak to this new digitally native generation with the gospel of Christ. And I certainly agree with that. But the problems arise in how he got to this idea. Wise claims that this is a theology of digital communication but he has very little theology that is based on the scriptures. He basically says that since the great reformer Martin Luther used the printing press to share his reforms with the world, we need to take advantage of our printing press: social media. How is that theology? Has he shown me how the scriptures bear on mass communication? I don't think so.

I also think that he is overly optimistic about how digital technology promotes human flourishing. And basically he's telling churches to get with the program or get left in the dust. In other words, churches will die and the mission of the church will be thwarted without embracing social media. Granted, I think it's important to for the church to embrace social media as an Outpost for the church but I do not believe that the church will fail without it for not even the gates of hell will prevail against it.

Another criticism: I didn't like the author's writing style. It was like he was trying too hard to be witty and funny and it showed. But to leave on a positive note, the chapter about having a big idea was really good.

Brent Soderstrum says

I won this book through GoodReads First Read program.

I am 51 years old and am a member of Lutheran Church of Hope so I am familiar with Justin Wise. I am also familiar with the fear of using social media to the extent the younger generation does today. I have a Facebook page but have never used Twitter. Some of the things Justin talked about in his book were new to me. I think he is right in saying that social media is a huge change in our society that is here to stay. The use of the internet is a huge change. There are so many new things that churches have to get on board the new train or they will be left at the station.

With that being said, I hope the younger people will be patient with those my age and older. We are a little afraid because we feel like we are losing control by stepping into something we aren't familiar with. Helping us get comfortable will help the church.

This books ideas apply outside the church too but the greatest focus should be bringing people to Jesus so its application in this segment of our lives is crucial.

Jon says

In The Social Church, Justin Wise attempts to think theologically about social media in this new era of

digital communication. He is uniquely qualified to write this as both a digital communications professional and a seminary graduate. I haven't seen many other books tackle this topic head-on and appreciate that Wise took the time to start what will hopefully be an ongoing discussion among church leaders.

While I believe this book often overstates the importance of social media, I do think it does a good job of explaining to churches why it is important to engage your congregation and community on new media platforms. One concept that really stuck with me is that social networks can be used to "rub-elbows" with the unchurched in ways that we may not be able to otherwise. It gave me a new perspective that by sharing life updates on facebook doesn't necessarily have to mean you are prideful and trying to get people to like you. You are letting people glimpse into your life which allows greater opportunity for further relationship building.

Much of the latter sections in the book deal with practical steps for churches to build a cohesive web strategy and presence. These are helpful steps that would be most helpful for those who have little/no online presence or frustrated that their strategy (or lack thereof) is not working. One of the last chapters seeks to help leaders on either side of the digital divide understand each other. It deals with this topic graciously and respectfully and I appreciate the approach.

With all these positives, I do have some qualms with The Social Church.

- + Wise errs on the side of pragmatism. While I think its great that he's thinking through these issues theologically, his theme seems to be to run as fast as you can with a new idea and try it without thinking about whether or not its a good idea.
- + Early in the book he advocates young leaders in the church to go against the wishes of older senior pastors and implement a social strategy without permission and ask for forgiveness later after you can show results. I believe this is a dangerous position to take and disrespectful of those in authority over you. Find a different way to communicate your vision to the leadership, but don't go rogue.
- + A large section of the book is devoted to addressing the embedded values of the social media culture. It agree that it is helpful to be aware of these values so that you know what you are working with. However, Wise indicates that he believes that the embedded values of the culture are neutral and we just need to redeem them. I believe values such as "It's all about me" are less than neutral and need to be redefined. As Christians with influence in the social media culture we can help shape new values.

Disclaimer: I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. I was under no obligation to offer a review, positive or otherwise.

Trina Lee says

If you're a leader within your church, read this book.

While social media is constantly changing, Justin Wise has written an evergreen book. He lays down a foundation of theology on which to build your organization's communication strategy for years to come. Justin skillfully connects the present to the past (e.g., Paul was using the latest technology when writing the epistles), while also contextualizing wisdom from contemporary thought leaders outside of the church (e.g., Chris Brogan). He also presents a compelling case for why church leaders should always be asking how new media can be used for Kingdom work.

This isn't a "how to" book, which Justin makes very clear in the introduction. He does though raise great questions that each church needs to answer for themselves. In Chapter 10, probably my favorite, Justin explains that you're going to fail if you first start with social media strategy. Instead, you first need to know

your church's unique purpose for your community, which Justin calls the "Big Idea." Only then can you build out the levels of strategy, first with content marketing, second with your website, and then finally with social media. In Chapter 12, Justin helps to bridge the digital generational divide that can often exist within the church.

I would recommend buying several copies, reading through it with both your communication and leadership teams.

Mohmed Ali says

Solve problem between Christians, Muslims and Jewish in the world

Hello,

It is seen from Revelation chapter 17:7 as follows 17:7 And the angel said to me, Why were you surprised? I will make clear to you the secret of the woman, and of the beast on which she is seated, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. against which the entrance of the European parliament the secret of the woman, and of the beast on which she is seated and the same is reflected bad symbol against entire European Countries. why it was not deleted in the interest of my Christians brothers and sisters who are living in the European countries.

We are informing you in the interest of BUILDING RELATIONS AND BREAKING BARRIERS between Jewish, Christians and the Muslims in the world for the following reasons.

In the Quran verses 7:137 and 167 may kindly read and record as follows.

137. And We made the people who were considered weak to inherit the eastern parts of the land and the western parts thereof which We have blessed. And the fair Word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because of their endurance. And We destroyed completely all the great works and buildings which Fir'aun (Pharaoh) and his people erected.

167. And (remember) when your Lord declared that He would certainly keep on sending against them (i.e. the Jews), till the Day of Resurrection, those who would afflict them with a humiliating torment. Verily, your Lord is Quick in Retribution (for the disobedient, wicked) and certainly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (for the obedient and those who beg Allah's Forgiveness).

Its rather unfortunate that Israel Government failed to approach the UN council and all other countries in the world to declare Palestinian as a State in the Israel in view of the Quran verses 7:137 in the interest of unity in the world.

Besides, Quran verse 7:167 is similar to Zechariah verse 12:2 may look into by all the Jewish in the world.

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BUILDING RELATIONS AND BREAKING BARRIERS

All the Jewish, Christians and Muslims in the

world ought to have followed old testament and quran

on the reasons that we are all the follows of our prophet

Abraham who is our father of all the Nations. prophet Abraham

God is one to all the Nations and all the Religious.It cannot said

that Allah is seprate and Abraham, Jesus and Moses God is seprate.

It is pertinent to note that Genesis verse 16:12,Zechariah 12:2 and Psalms

verse 83 are relating to Jewish, but not relating to Christians

the aforesaid verses are came into force, When no Christians

and Muslims were lived and it cannot said that two verses are

indicated to the Muslims by the Christians. As a matter of fact,

between Christians and Muslims, there is no co-operations.

In support of the above verses every Christians can interpret Zechariah verse which is relating to Jewish and Isreal and Palestine.

Every Christians can look into the matter in the interest

Co-operation between Christians and Muslims in the world.

Praise the lord

V.Mohamed Ali

Research Associates of International development

Sakkimangalam,Madurai,

Tamilnadu,India- 625201

Eric says

I enjoyed Wise's writing style. He is on to some good points and raises questions with which many churches need to wrestle. I wish he would have done some more of the theology work.

Nikhil says

I feel that the first disclaimer I should make is that I am not, in fact, a Christian. That being said, *The Social Church* starts does not adequately plumb the depths of the significance social media. Wise has made a compelling argument regarding the necessity of expanding into social media. He provides many well

reasoned arguments and insightful anecdotes with regards to a church needing to "keep up with the times" in regards to technology. However, he only broaches the subject in the context of reaching the younger generation. It is here I find an issue; That is, the concept of reaching. There is a distinction that should be drawn between interaction and communication. It is one thing to have a post be seen, liked, or re-tweeted. It is another to have it post communicate an idea. While Wise does touch upon this with the "Big Idea" concept, it is a very cursory look. It fails to address the issue of a dumbing down of the message. In an article about her experiences with Twitter, Schulz said she found herself thinking in tweets. If one keeps teaching in 140 characters, it will in most cases, be given a matching amount of cognition. While Facebook allows for larger posts, it still holds the pitfalls of oversimplification to the point of missing the purpose of engaging the community. Wise addresses an accumulation of members, a way to survive in the new age. However, I might posit that a while a church may boast a large congregation, it is a moot point if it fails to teach anything. In summary, while Wise wonderfully presents the impetus for the modernization of Church communication, he does a disservice by failing to address the issue that is transmitting the message in a way which it can be used to teach.

I received a free copy of this book via a Goodreads giveaway.
