

Review

Jae Hoon Lee. *Great to Good: How Following Jesus Reshapes Our Ambitions*. Lisle, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2024. 179 Pages ISBN 978-1-5140-1065-5

By Byung Suk Kim, DMin

Reviewing Rev. Jae Hoon Lee's *Great to Good* brings a sense of deep personal joy and nostalgic reflection. This is because I had the privilege of serving as an associate pastor under Rev. Lee's leadership during my tenure at Onnuri Church. It is strikingly paradoxical, yet spiritually profound, that the leader of such a monumental institution - a megachurch with over 75,000 members and dozens of vision churches worldwide - would champion goodness in Christ over outward greatness.¹ Rev. Lee, an alumnus of Myongji University and Hapdong Theological Seminary (M.Div.), furthered his academic journey at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Th.M. program) and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (D.Min). This academic trajectory has allowed him to maintain a masterful balance between biblical essence and contemporary context. Currently serving as the chairman of the Korea Lausanne Committee, he stands as a model of a theological pastor awakening the church to its public responsibility and global missional calling.

This book presents a bold spiritual reversal of the logic found in Jim Collins' management classic, *Good to Great*.² Lee observes that the modern church has indiscriminately adopted worldly management principles, becoming trapped in the idol of great growth. Instead, he calls for a return to the biblical core of goodness, which is found only through a relationship with Jesus Christ. The book unfolds through three spiritual movements.

The first movement is the deconstruction of ambition and the surrender of sovereignty. Lee provides the insight that our pursuit of greatness often stems from the fallen nature of wanting to be like God, echoing the primordial temptation: "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Gen 3:5). He asserts that secular

¹ Onnuri Community Church, "Vision and History," accessed April 1, 2026, onnuri.org.

² Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), 12.

success or human ambition can never be the goal of faith; rather, the starting point of faith is honestly facing one's weakness before Christ.

The second movement involves the formation of character through union with Christ. Lee argues that the goodness of Christ's character cannot be reached through human willpower or self-help. As stated in John 15:5 - "I am the vine; you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing" - it is only when the self is broken at the Cross and deeply united with Jesus that His character can bear fruit within us. This is not merely moral refinement but a radical shift in life's direction: moving away from secular achievement toward the orientation of becoming like Jesus Christ.

The third movement is the manifestation of goodness in daily life as a representative of Christ and the fulfillment of public responsibility. Christians are not competitors vying for the same type of success as the world; they are to be an alternative presence, questioning worldly values through their holy character. When we remain in Christ and manifest good deeds (Matt 5:16), the world finally sees God through the church. This, Lee concludes, is the true publicity of faith and the spiritual influence the church must recover.

Lee's pastoral philosophy is rooted in a solid Reformed and Evangelical theological background, consistently weaving the theme of grace over works. Having witnessed his leadership firsthand, I can testify that his prose mirrors his lived conviction - always emphasizing the meaning of the Cross and the sovereignty of Christ. Notably, the book's 50 concise chapters serve as a practical tool for spiritual recalibration rather than a mere theoretical read. By meditating on one chapter a day and communing deeply with Jesus, readers undergo a process of spiritual formation, dismantling the idols of secular success and filling that space with the reign of Christ.³

The book's spiritual apologetic against corporate discourse is another major strength. Instead of the corporate approach that emphasizes efficiency and performance, Lee proposes the paradox of the Cross - stopping and lowering oneself so that God's power may rest upon us. He spiritually demonstrates that the church's identity comes not from worldly success but from the holy character of the living

³ Jae Hoon Lee, *Great to Good* (Seoul: Duranno, 2017), 45.

Christ within us. This shift in direction is an essential foundation for fulfilling a Christian's responsibility in the social and public spheres. Ultimately, this book is a powerful prophetic message to the global church, which often founders in the face of performance-driven metrics. The Theology of Goodness forged in the dynamic missional context of Korea provides a universal spiritual compass for churches worldwide, reminding us that we should not boast of our greatness in numbers, but serve the global community with the mature goodness found in Christ.

In conclusion, *Great to Good* is a poignant wake-up call to a modern church that has lost its intimacy with Jesus due to its ambition for greatness. Lee is convinced that when we return to the goodness of Christ, the true power to transform the world is restored. This principle, proven in the massive ministry field of Onnuri Church, serves as a spiritual milestone for all Christians today. I strongly recommend this book to pastors who are experiencing burnout from performance-driven ministry and wish to recover their first love with Jesus, as well as to all believers struggling between worldly success and the public responsibility of their faith.

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