

*Written to be Heard: Recovering the Messages of the Gospels.*

by Paul Borgman and Kelly James Clark. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. 328 pp. \$30.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-7704-8.

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Reading the Gospels is a skill that requires some understanding of how each text goes about telling the story of Jesus. The purpose of this volume is to help beginning students of the Bible develop their skills at identifying the narrative arc and central themes of each Gospel.

With N.T. Wright, authors Paul Borgman and Kelly Clark emphasize the importance of attending to the whole of the narrative, not just the beginning and the end, and to considering how the parts contribute to the whole. They also stress that the written Gospels were “written to be heard.” This translates into attention to patterns that occur and recur in each text.

Following a brief introduction, the volume is divided into five parts, one for each Gospel. Because Acts is treated as an extension of Luke, one part is dedicated also to this text. Each part contains five to seven short chapters, on average twelve pages in length, making the volume well designed for parish or classroom settings.

Each chapter examines a subsection of the unfolding narrative, keeping the focus sharply on the story being told. The authors employ straightforward language that draws readers into the biblical text. Copious subheadings serve as guideposts. The experience is of reading alongside a master reader, who skillfully guides us through the landscape of the text, ensuring that we don’t miss key points on the way.

The volume does not stray into historical background, discussion of authorship, or consideration of genre. This is in no way a shortcoming; there are other places to find such information. The result is that the authors challenge readers to keep their attention fully on the text and only the text. This is, as experienced readers know, harder than it seems.

Such focused reading also challenges readers to set aside their assumptions about what the text means based on information outside the text. This, too, is harder than it seems. A distinctive aspect of the volume is the attention to “hearing cues”: ways in which the narrative appeals to the ear rather than the eye. This opens up new dimensions in the reading/hearing experience and illuminates often overlooked aspects of the text. If there is a critique, it is that this could be developed even more.

This well-conceived volume is recommended to any who have an interest in the practice of reading with care in order to hear what the Gospels say.