

Alumni Spotlight: Jonathan Dodson (MDiv '05, ThM'06)



Current Title: Lead Pastor, City Life Church

Family: Wife: Robie, Children: Owen, Ellie, and Rosamund

Favorite Professors: Tim Tennent, Richard Lovelace, Sean McDonough

Favorite Class: Applied Anthropology

Favorite Memory: Going to get pizza with Dr. Lovelace and getting lost.

What have you been doing since you left Gordon-Conwell and where are you serving now?

We moved to Austin, Texas in 2006 to reach the creative class by planting City Life Church. It was more difficult and rewarding than I imagined. Out of this need we launched a local church planting network to equip, network, and encourage local planters. City Life has helped plant gospel-centered churches locally and globally to renew cities. During this time, we also started Gospel-Centered Discipleship, which exists to equip writers and other Christians to make, mature, and multiply disciples of Jesus, and I have written a number of books.

What do you love about your work?

I have loved helping people deal with cultural objections to Christianity and seeing the Holy Spirit help them internalize the gospel so they can be freed from idolatry, comforted in heartache, and imparted spiritual joy from their union with Christ. It is also a special joy to see people mature into leaders, pastors, and church planters who carry the gospel forward for Christ's Church.

What are the particular joys and biggest challenges of planting a church in your context?

One of the most difficult things has been enduring spiritual warfare that comes through divisive people, uncharitable criticism, and abandonment. Church leaders are often treated as relationally disposable, with members filing



complaints, rarely expressing encouragement, and then moving on. The transience of Austin has also been a particular challenge. We've had about six churches in sixteen years, and they have all been called City Life Church.

I sense a special, Spirit-imbued joy when I preach. It is an incredible privilege to preach God's Word to God's people. I feel most alive when I am writing and look forward to, Lord willing, writing many more books in service of pastors and the church.

What has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact/influence on your ministry?

My Gordon-Conwell education put me way ahead of many planters who did not receive such excellent training. I learned to think more critically and logically through exegesis and hermeneutics. Sermon prep was deeper and quicker because of my facility with languages and general biblical knowledge. Tim Tennent's missiology trained me to engage post-Christian cultures with wisdom, Richard Lovelace gave me a Kuyperian vision for ministry with a whole gospel for a whole city, and I am indebted to the tremendous deposit I received from many more professors.

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are just entering pastoral ministry or are considering church planting?

Hold your plans loosely and Christ tightly. Rest well and often, both spiritually and physically. Develop godly elders who function not only as a team but as friends. Pray often, freely, and honestly. Guard yourself from ministry becoming a mistress, and do not sacrifice your family for influence, vision, or reputation. Remind yourself that God uses suffering to produce great beauty, both in you and others. Take the long view of people and ministry, seeing them from glory backwards not merely sin forwards. Remember, the pressure is off to execute perfectly because Jesus was executed for our perfection.

Do you have any publications, links, or resources to share?

- Explore [books authored by Jonathan Dodson](#).
- Learn more about [City Life Church](#) (Austin, TX) and [Gospel-Centered Discipleship](#).