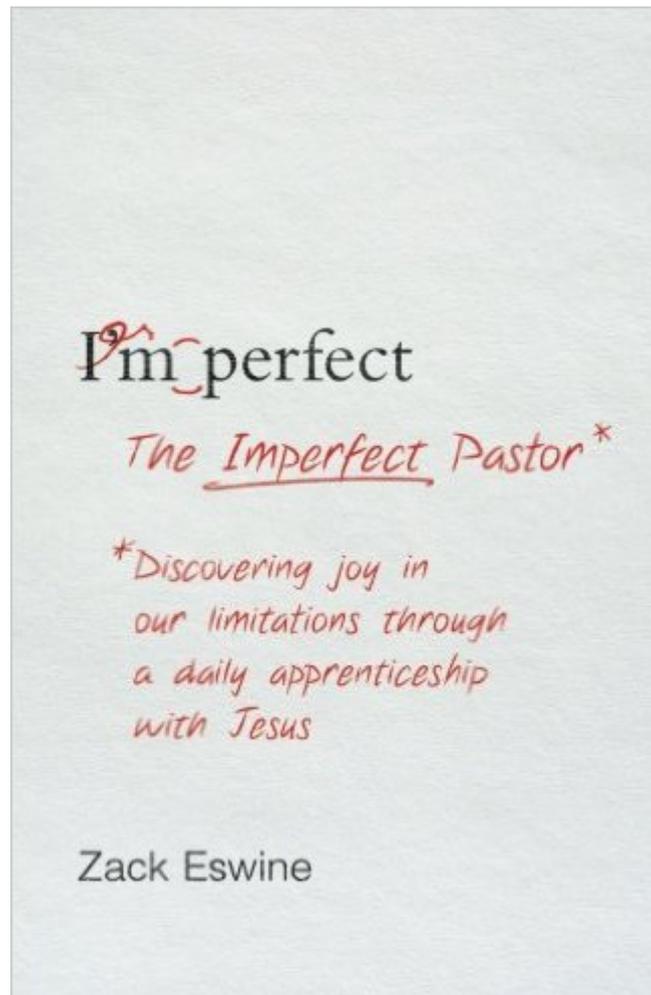


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The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy In Our Limitations Through A Daily Apprenticeship With Jesus



Synopsis

Dear Pastor, Desire burns within you. You've trained and dreamt of doing large things in famous ways as fast as you can for God's glory. But pastoral work keeps requiring your surrender to small, mostly overlooked things over long periods of time. You stand at a crossroads. Jesus stands with you. You were never meant to know everything, fix everything, and be everywhere at once. That's his job, not yours. So what now? Let the apprenticeship begin.

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Customer Reviews

Post-apocalyptic movies always begin the same way. The scene opens upon the heels of catastrophe—all of humanity's best laid plans have quite literally exploded around us, and the few survivors are left to pull together what remains and eke out some semblance of meaning and purpose from the ashes. So call Zack Eswine's latest book, *The Imperfect Pastor*, something like a post-apocalyptic pastoral theology. Having experienced desolation himself, both personal and pastoral, Eswine forges a way forward for pastors in the far from perfect world we live in. Simply put, he explores the calling we pursue (part 1), the temptations we face (part 2), reshaping our inner life (part 3), and reshaping the work we do (part 4). What is immediately striking about the book is its tone. There are many books in pastoral theology today promising seven steps to a better church, or the secret key to unlocking ministry leadership potential in order to grow your church tenfold. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are many other books that react against this sort of "Leadership Industrial Complex" (to quote Jared Wilson) with uneasiness, distrust, and even cynicism. Having seen such grand promises fall through, the second sort of book warns the reader

against the church growth movement and its allurements. While they rightly (in my opinion) point out the errors of the first, few go so far as to chart a practical way forward. This is what is remarkable about Eswine's work: his own personal disasters and disillusionment with chasing a "professional" ministry seem to have chastened him and created in him a humble wisdom that is grateful for small things. What does pastoral ministry look like without speaking platforms, book deals, podcasts, and networks?

The landscape of books on pastoral ministry is so broad that it's tough to discern what you're going to get when picking up another book on the subject. You can almost categorize most of these books into simple summary statements: "Care about your leadership more than your people." "You need the right charisma and strategy to win people." "God put you in this position because he wants you to succeed." But what about when people write books that say "the key to pastoral ministry is realizing you can't."? Do pastors have a category, much less a bent towards these books? Probably not. But we need these books. So badly. The Imperfect Pastor is a message every single current pastor and future pastor needs to hear. Megachurch visionaries and community church shepherds alike will benefit greatly from what Eswine has written here. A gentle but firm reminder that we are, indeed, imperfect, but have been employed by and serve a perfect Jesus. There are two phrases near the beginning of this book that struck me and have stayed with me since finishing. Both are ideas not often found in books like these: "Almost anything in life that truly matters will require you to do small, mostly insignificant tasks over a long period of time" | "the pastoral vocation, because it focuses on helping people what truly matters, is therefore no exception. Our desire for greatness in ministry isn't the problem. Our problem rises from how the haste of doing large things, famously and as fast as we can, is reshaping our definition of what a great thing is" | "Desire greatness, dear pastor! But bend your definition of greatness to the one Jesus gives us. That hit me like a ton of bricks. As I dive into a life of ministry, where's my heart?"

When I first read Sensing Jesus by Zack Eswine, I liked it so much that I bought a paper copy to go with the Kindle version. It's a good thing, too, because my wife has claimed rights to the paperback and has marked it up. It's a book that I planned to read and re-read. It's a book I recommended that every pastor read. No more. I now recommend his new book The Imperfect Pastor, an updated and shortened version of Sensing Jesus. It addresses the same issue: our desire to do large things in famous ways as fast as we can. "When I started, I did not know that a pastoral vocation in Jesus

would limit me, slow me down, and painfully undo the misguided mentoring of my life," Eswine writes. "Now, I know that my success and joy as a pastor depend on this. So does yours." The Imperfect Pastor feels like a chronology of my temptations as a pastor. Part one begins with our calling. Desire is good, but it can be twisted by evil, especially as we drink from the "stale waters of celebrity, consumerism, and immediate gratification." We desire to do great things for God, but our definition of greatness is often different than God's. "Almost anything in life that truly matters will require you to do small, mostly overlooked things, over a long period of time with him." Eswine reminds us that pastoral ministry is creaturely. We pastor as humans; "greatness, even in ministry, cannot escape humanity." We must find our place with ordinary people in ordinary places, and love the people right in front of us. We must learn to serve within ministries that are often mundane, invisible, uncontrollable, and unfinished.

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