



The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy in Our Limitations through a Daily Apprenticeship with Jesus. Zack Eswine. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015, 272pp, paperback, ISBN: 978-1-4335-4933-5

Zack Eswine writes as a broken pastor who, with a quiet but confident hope, tells of the grace Jesus has shown to him over the years of pastoral ministry, and how that grace has shaped his ministry to be more like the Saviour's. The book reads like you're sitting down with a gentle, caring mentor who has years of experience in the trench warfare of the pastoral calling. But this battle-scarred veteran listens and speaks with the joy of the victories amidst the scars. His stories of real-life interactions put flesh to ministry principles. With humble wisdom he occasionally says, "Pause here. Don't rush past

what I just said... Read that last sentence again if you need to," and those are good spots to do just that.

In the first section of the book he challenges us to evaluate our motives and how our ministry is shaped by them. He exhorts us to joyfully pursue the greatness of a calling that is lived out in the ordinary and mundane of everyday life with what matters deeply to Jesus: His sheep... our flock. "If Jesus's pastoral work consisted of doing large things famously as fast as he could in the most efficient way possible, I would never have known him." "God is allowing you to sit with others he has loved and pursued all the days of their lives."

In the second section, he wisely lays out and cautions us on the pastoral temptations of trying to act like we can be everywhere, fix everything, and know it all. He warns us of the besetting pastoral sin of impatience and encourages us to humbly give space in our ministry for people to grow and for Jesus to work, because He will. Like John the Baptist, we must say "I am not the Christ." I am limited in my abilities and my location. I can't do it all, but I can do what Jesus calls me to and equips me for, though always with a limp and leaning on Him.

With gentle care in the third section, Zack trains us for the pastoral marathon so that we joyfully endure its challenges for the rewards of longevity in ministry and the gospel finish line. Along the way that training includes inwardly cultivating a quiet heart that finds rest in the Saviour, eyes that behold Him, and setting a pace under the burdens of life and ministry that can be sustained to the finish line.

In his final section, dealing more with the external aspects of imperfect ministry lived out, he encourages and trains in the ministries of presence, touch, and prayer with those who are suffering. He leads us in thinking through disciplining the sinners in our

congregation, and then rejoicing in forgiving the repentant. He writes of how good it is to live and grow with our actual congregation, not the congregation we wish they were, and of leading them well by embodying what we invite them to follow. He writes of the process of leading well and of training up others to lead. "If everyone is involved using their gifts, then the mark of the congregation as a whole, not of my individual personality, will undergird the place. This matters because someday in life I might not be here, but many of them will." Zack's closing chapter is a reminder that we are called to mundane greatness, to be realistically romantic: "We long for heroic moments but recognize that they aren't heaven and that someone else among a rare few will most likely have that momentary role. We are realistic about the fact that heroic moments are not the normal way that God daily visits his people. And yet we still believe that God is doing something larger than we can presently see."

I read this book last year and enjoyed it immensely. As I wrote this review, I read over what I had highlighted, which was a lot, and it was refreshing and relieving. I have read other books on pastoral ministry and, at times, have come away feeling anxious, uncertain whether or not I could ever live up to the expectations and demands of God's calling to shepherd His people. When I read *The Imperfect Pastor* I come away greatly challenged, knowing I have areas in my ministry that need to change and grow for God's glory, but also greatly encouraged. As Darryl Dash has put it, "He makes me long for the kind of ministry he describes in the pages of this book." The work we're called to do is serious and heavy, but in reading this book, I feel weight being lifted, some of the tension and stress of ministry lightening, and the hope of what the Saviour can do even with the likes of me... and you. You and I, we're both imperfect pastors. But we have a Hero who is active daily in our story, His story, our great Saviour, Jesus. Zack Eswine does a good job of reminding us of that.