

Review

Jethani, Sky. 2017. *Immeasurable: Reflections on the Soul of Ministry in the Age of Church, Inc.* Moody Publishing.

By Jonathan Neufeld, Bed, MDiv

Pastors face all kinds of pressures in their ministry but one of the most subtle but often most pervasive pressures is the pressure to succeed in the way that the North American evangelical subculture defines success -- to have a big, well-known and far-reaching ministry. This is a pressure that comes from watching and reading and following the success stories of pastors who have 'succeeded' -- who have huge congregations with large buildings and big budgets and a lot of amazing stories. The subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, message that is often communicated by those pastors is that if only everyone else could be like them and do ministry the way that they do it, they too could be successful. Naturally there is much to be learned from the wisdom and success of such people. However, sometimes the wisdom and success that those pastors put out can lead to either an unhealthy drive to emulate everything they did or discouragement and a sense of insignificance for those who don't 'succeed.'

Sky Jethani's *Immeasurable* is a refreshing book in response to that kind of pressure. It is a book about pastoral ministry for those who are 'regular' pastors -- that is those who do what most pastors do -- faithful, long-term, ongoing shepherding and preaching in average-size churches with average-size buildings, average-size budgets and average -- but good -- ministries. In *Immeasurable*, Jethani examines the kind of pressures that come on pastors from what he calls "Church, Inc." "Church, Inc.," Jethani explains, is the "spiritual, mechanical approach to ministry...[that is] devoid of mystery, for pastors who assume that the exercise of their calling is a matter of skill more than the gravity of their soul. It represents the exchange of the transcendent calling of Christian ministry with mere management of religious institutions and services." (p. 10) It is this approach to ministry -- a 'how-to-be-successful' approach -- that Jethani pokes and prods at as he leads his readers through a series of topics that pastors deal with all the time.

Jethani's opening chapter examines ambition and the motives that lead pastors into ministry -- a topic that all pastors (or at least the vast majority) struggle with in light of 'Church, Inc.' The next chapter questions what 'effectiveness' really looks like in a church and challenges the "Idol of Effectiveness," and proposes what really should be measured in pastoral ministry. A few chapters later Jethani talks about the pressures that pastors feel when they compare themselves to celebrity pastors and later when they compare themselves to other 'regular' pastors in their area. He addresses the pressures to work in order to succeed and the need for rest. He tackles the questions of consumerism in the church ('church shopping') and technology (tweeting - 'Does a pastor need to be tweeting?') and what he calls the 'Evangelical Industrial Complex' which he compares to the Military Industrial Complex -- a section of the economy that has to continually create celebrity pastors in order to remain in business. Along the way Jethani also offers his thoughts on preaching, raising up future leaders, being a shepherd of God's people and a variety of other topics that a pastor deals with in the course of ministry.

What makes Jethani's observations effective is that he writes both as someone who has done pastoral ministry and knows the kinds of thoughts and questions that pastors have (but rarely verbalize), and as a former editor for *Leadership Journal*, which means that he has also been very much on the inside of Church, Inc. This means that he brings a unique perspective to his writing. Jethani pokes at 'Church, Inc.' without ranting and raging against it and without getting personal, but he does dissect it in a way that helps pastors see through the gleaming aspects of it to think more carefully about what pastoral ministry could and should really look like. Jethani's writing style is easy to read and each topic that he addresses is short -- only a couple of pages -- but he gets to the point, makes his point and then moves on.

This is a book well worth reading. It is an easy read (which is helpful for a busy pastor), it is insightful and takes a refreshing approach to the kind of questions and thoughts that pastors often have. Jethani is strongest when he writes about the workings of 'Church, Inc.' and the subculture of North American evangelicalism. When he starts to drift into topics around preaching and shepherding it is clear that he hasn't thought through these areas as deeply as many others have but he nonetheless offers food for thought. Interestingly, even as Jethani pokes at 'Church, Inc' he remains deeply involved in all that goes with being a successful writer /

blogger / podcaster / speaker / consultant / etc. / etc. / within 'Church, Inc.' For some that may not be a problem considering the message that Jethani communicates and his call for pastors to recognize and not get caught by the pressures of it all. For others, however, there will be a sense of dissonance as it seems that much of what he pokes at, he does himself. Either way, what Jethani offers in this book will be helpful for those who faithfully serve as pastors and want to think about and see their roles in the context of North American evangelical subculture in a new and refreshing way.

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Jonathan Neufeld, review of *Immeasurable: Reflections on the Soul of Ministry in the Age of Church, Inc.*, by Sky Jethani, Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research. www.nimer.ca, (date posted).