

“Not often do I come across a book that lands squarely in my heart and covers me with conviction in painful but healing ways. Jeremy Writebol’s reflections on pastoring, in light of Jesus’ words for the seven churches in Revelation, are wise, measured, and profound, applying the heart of the gospel to the heart of the pastor.”

—TREVIN WAX,
vice president for research and resource development at the
North American Mission Board; visiting professor at
Cedarville University; author of *The Thrill of Orthodoxy*,
The Multi-Directional Leader, and *This Is Our Time*

“For a host of reasons, the feeling of weariness has reached a fever pitch in recent days. What better time than now for a meaningful, life-giving, hope-filled reflection on Jesus’ answer to weariness to be shared with the world. In *Jesus Is Enough*, Jeremy has provided such a reflection. For all who are eager to see and savor the rest-giving attributes of Jesus afresh, I highly recommend this book.”

—SCOTT SAULS,
senior pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church;
author of *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *Beautiful People Don’t Just Happen*

“Pastoring is a hard job. There are so many aspects of this calling that go virtually unseen by the watching world, and yet carry great emotional and spiritual weight. It seems there’s an increasing number of us keeping one eye on the door in case it gets to be too much. Nothing will make this calling easy, but this book offers great hope and help for navigating the path and walking in truth. If you’re a pastor, whether you’re feeling burnt out or not, you should read this book. It will help you if you’re struggling, and it will prepare you for when later struggles come.”

—RUSS RAMSEY,
pastor and author of *Rembrandt Is In the Wind*:
Learning to Love Art Through the Eyes of Faith

“In *Jesus Is Enough*, Jeremy addresses pastoral idolatries head-on: personal reputation, ministry metrics, doctrinal correctness, church influence, and more. He helps leaders take humbling inventory of our own temptations, while also inspiring us to build our worth and ministry on the incomparable sufficiency of Jesus. Like a best man in a wedding, this book urges us to not steal the bride’s attention, but to rejoice in her attentiveness to the great Groom. I believe God will use this book to diminish petty pastoral idolatries and increase our estimation and enjoyment of Jesus Christ.”

—JONATHAN DODSON,
author, *The Unwavering Pastor*

“Jeremy is writer for our times, with a work that speaks deeply to the hearts of pastors who are trying to faithfully shepherd in a pandemic shaped world. Using the seven churches of Revelation as a unique backdrop, *Pastor, Jesus Is Enough* grounds the difficult vocation of all pastors in the sufficiency of Christ and the hope of the gospel. A timely read for our challenging times.”

—RONNIE MARTIN,
lead pastor of Substance Church in Ashland, Ohio, cohost of *The Happy Rant Podcast*, and coauthor of *Pastoring Small Towns*

“Rich with insight, *Pastor, Jesus Is Enough*, is a beautiful reminder that the self-worth of the pastor lies not in their occupation but in the person of Jesus. Writebol provides the reader with the helpful perspective of seeing Jesus as the hero of the pastor’s life and church. Jesus is not impressed with our resume or our efforts to promote ourselves about the name of Jesus. This book will be helpful to any pastor seeking a renewed perspective of the love of Jesus.”

—JIMMY DODD,
founder and president, PastorServe; author of *Survive or Thrive*,
Six Relationships Every Pastor Needs; *Pastors Are People Too*;
What Great Ministry Leaders Get Right;
and *The Magnificent Names of Jesus*

“The pressure of pastoring has rarely been greater than it is today. Jeremy reminds us that there is hope and comfort for the weary soul. This is a must read for every pastor who is being crushed under the weight of unrealistic expectations. The Good News is and has always been that Jesus is enough for his church, both shepherds and sheep.”

—CHRIS BROOKS,
senior pastor, Woodside Bible Church

“Pastoral work has always had its challenges, those challenges have only increased in a post-Covid world. In this timely book, Jeremy Writebol, tenderly reminds those in ministry of the one thing we can never forget: Jesus is enough.”

—BRIAN BRODERSEN,
pastor, Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, CA

“Pastors matter to God. One clear evidence is when he raises up compassionate and compelling messages that speak with enduring relevance to the possibilities and perils of our call. *Jesus Is Enough* is one such message! Jeremy Writebol has done a great service to church leaders by offering this fascinating and timely study of Christ’s words in Revelation to pastors. May we all experience the resilience and renewal for which this book was written!”

—DAVE HARVEY,
president of Great Commission Collective; author of
When Sinners Say I Do, The Plurality Principle, and Stronger Together!

“Building on the ancient words of Jesus to seven pastors, Jeremy Writebol brings necessary biblical clarity to the job description of today’s pastors and challenges them to fulfill it through the sufficiency of Christ. Fresh, insightful, honest, and necessary—a must read!”

—DOUG SCHMIDT,
former senior pastor of Woodside Bible Church;
executive director of Barnabas Ministries of Michigan

“Ministry in Jesus’ name has never been easy, and it seems to be growing harder. The ancient trilemma of devil, world, and flesh against us continues. But today’s cultural decay, social turmoil, and political vitriol have ramped things up a notch—pastors are clearly an endangered species. Jeremy Writebol knows that firsthand. But he’s learned that though he doesn’t have what it takes to lead a church through times of tumult, Jesus does. Jesus is enough, Writebol reminds us, so quit trying to make ministry all about you. This book is chock full of biblical, practical wisdom for faithful ministry in this increasingly faithless era. Take and read; the soul you save may be your own.”

—HAROLD L. SENKBEIL,
author of *The Care of Souls*

PASTOR,
JESUS IS
ENOUGH

HOPE FOR THE WEARY, THE BURNED OUT, AND THE BROKEN

PASTOR,
JESUS IS
ENOUGH

HOPE FOR THE WEARY, THE BURNED OUT, AND THE BROKEN

JEREMY WRITEBOL

FOREWORD BY JARED C. WILSON



LEXHAM PRESS



Pastor, Jesus Is Enough: Hope for the Weary, the Burned Out, and the Broken

Copyright 2023 Jeremy Writebol

Lexham Press, 1313 Commercial St., Bellingham, WA 98225

LexhamPress.com

You may use brief quotations from this resource in presentations, articles, and books. For all other uses, please write Lexham Press for permission. Email us at permissions@lexhampress.com.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are the author's own translation or are from the *ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (CSB) are from The Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers, all rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Print ISBN 9781683596738

Digital ISBN 9781683596745

Library of Congress Control Number 2022945984

Lexham Editorial: Todd Hains, Jeff Reimer, Allie Boman, Mandi Newell, Jessi Strong

Cover Design: Brittany Schrock

Typesetting: Justin Marr

To Josh Carrillo and Paul Ortlinghaus,
fellow pastors and those “brothers of my heart”

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	XII
PRAYER FOR REST IN JESUS	XVI
CHAPTER ONE	
<i>Pastor, You Belong to Jesus</i>	1
CHAPTER TWO	
<i>Pastors Love Jesus the Most</i>	9
CHAPTER THREE	
<i>Pastors Suffer</i>	29
CHAPTER FOUR	
<i>Pastors Teach and Tell the Truth</i>	45
CHAPTER FIVE	
<i>Pastors Become Like Jesus</i>	63
CHAPTER SIX	
<i>Pastors Abide in Jesus</i>	85
CHAPTER SEVEN	
<i>Pastors Find Their Value in Jesus</i>	101
CHAPTER EIGHT	
<i>Pastors Repent</i>	119
CHAPTER NINE	
<i>Pastor, Jesus Is Enough</i>	137
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	150
ENDNOTES	154
WORKS CITED	160
SCRIPTURE INDEX	164

FOREWORD

Pastoring churches is a weighty thing. It can also be an anxious thing. It is telling that in 2 Corinthians 11, after the apostle Paul has torn through a litany of afflictions and hardships that amount to his suffering for Christ—things like beatings and whippings, shipwrecks and assassination attempts, robbers and wild animals, starvation and hypothermia—he adds at the end of that list: “And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (v. 28).

I would add, just as a bit of applicational commentary, that *on top of all that* there is the frequent reality that a pastor must experience the daily pressure of this anxiety for the church *alone*. Or, at least, it often feels that way.

In 2021, we saw the first significant spike in years in the number of pastors who reported they were thinking about quitting. Over the last few years, the rank politicization of evangelicalism, the justice debates, the increasing balkanization among evangelical sub-cultures, and of course the coronavirus pandemic have all seemed to make shepherding even more weighty than it already was. I fear that in into the future, we’ll begin to see more and more of our precious pastors crack under the weight of their anxiety for the church. What can be done?

Well, in 2 Corinthians 11:30–33, Paul directs us to embrace our weakness and rely on the rescuing hand of God. And this is exactly where Jeremy Writebol takes you in this book. Jeremy is not going to help you pretend your problems aren’t real. He’s not going to show you how to fake it until you make it. He’s not going to puff you up with superficial inspiration that won’t address the

real challenges you face, the real burdens you bear, or the real power you have available to you. No, in *Pastor, Jesus Is Enough*, he is bluntly honest about that pressure, about that anxiety, about the fact that pastoring often *hurts*. But he also relentlessly points you to your only hope—the affectionate grace of Jesus, more abundant than all our afflictions.

Let Jeremy pastor you through these pages. Because shepherds need shepherds who have already walked the dark and winding path before them and can show them the way, who can in effect be a light. Whether you feel the weight of the last few years on your shoulders and are on the verge of packing it in, or whether you are just plodding through the regular pressure of anxiety for your church and need the encouragement of the gospel, you have a trustworthy friend in your hand.

Jared C. Wilson,
Kansas City, Missouri

PRAYER FOR
REST IN JESUS

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

Psalm 16:5–6

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.

You make known to me the path of life;

in your presence there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. *Psalm 16:10–11*

Almighty God, you have revealed your Son to us and blessed us through him. Grant that we may rest settled in him, never turning here or there, but as we entrust ourselves to his care be so satisfied with his all-sufficiency as our king and priest and mediator. Grant this so that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found. By your mercy grant that we may offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹

“JOHN TO THE seven churches that are in Asia:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”

REVELATION 1:4-8, 17-18

CHAPTER ONE

PASTOR,
YOU BELONG
TO JESUS

I t's exhausting, trying to be enough.

As our worship team opened our gathering with a welcome, my heart sank. The room was unusually quiet. Normally at least half the seats would be filled at the beginning of the service, with stragglers and those persistently behind showing up to fill the room by the time we had begun to sing the second or third song. But that dynamic had changed. On this particular Sunday there were maybe ten people in the room. The room that had been so full before was so, so silent.

I looked around wondering whether anyone else would show up. My heart hoped. A sea of troubles had crashed down on our congregation and on me as the pastor. I was defeated. Certainly, I had done my best to uphold the church. I wanted to see it be vibrant in its witness and work. I was concerned that the church be faithful in obedience to the Word of God, vital in our love for each other and our neighbors, and—more than anything—be the Christ-centered body of grace that our world desperately needed. Following the lead of my pastoral mentors, I wanted to be patient where there was disagreement, careful and wise in decision-making that would serve the weak and weary. Where there was a need for correction and discipline in the church, I tried to wield the sword of the Spirit as a physician's scalpel, not a butcher's cleaver. And yet, I couldn't be enough.

When a few in the church took issue with some statements of solidarity and compassion with hurting racial minorities in our community over police brutality, the charges for the explosion were set. As I navigated the complaints and criticism alongside fellow elders of my church, we sought to address the hearts of these individuals who had so vehemently objected. Instead of being open to correction they revolted and took a significant number of attenders in the church with them. The church was cut in half.

On that first Sunday after I looked around the room, I saw how many people were absent, and my heart broke. I tried so hard to hold it all together. I had lived my life trying to be a faithful, wise, and compassionate pastor. I gave every effort to lead well. And it was all gone. For five years I had seen the trajectory of the church move upward in all the “measurable categories.” Attendance grew every year. We were on the brink of making plans for a building expansion or even relocation to a larger facility. Baptisms and conversions were frequent, membership was increasing, giving was abounding, leaders were multiplying, small groups growing, staff was being hired. All the best stuff of ministry was taking place. And within fewer than six months all the victories seemed to be wiped out. Some remained, but what had become of my beautiful church?

The psalmist’s words, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain,” echoed in my mind (Ps 127:1). Had I built in vain? Had I preached, served, disciplined, prayed with, blessed, encouraged all for nothing? I compared myself to the couple John Piper warned about who wasted their lives collecting seashells.² At least they had the seashells. I had the remnant of a relationally bombed-out church. Shame washed over me because I was the leader. This wasn’t supposed to happen under my watch. I *wasn’t* enough.

Pastor, you aren’t enough either.

I don’t say that to be demeaning or to discount your accomplishments or faithfulness in ministry. I’m not trying to compare us, as if to say, “I couldn’t be enough, so why in the world would you think you could be?” I’m trying to express the truth the Bible often draws out about how sufficient we are for the calling and work of ministry. Even the apostle Paul asked, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16). And he was the apostle Paul. So we shouldn’t think we are the exception. We aren’t enough. We were never meant to be.

Our frustrations with this reality boil over from our own ambitions and perceptions and even definitions of what success in ministry should be. We want to pastor and lead well, so that

the church will grow, and the measurable stuff of ministry will bloom all around us. Any setback, deficiency, or call for assistance makes us vulnerable to the charge of failure. We're like a small child wanting to be independent, shouting at their parent, "I can do it!"

I am not enough. You are not enough. Gratefully, our Savior Jesus, whom we serve, knows this. Here's how I know.

In 2018 the multisite church that I pastor began going through a significant leadership transition. Our senior pastor of over twenty-five years had announced his intentions to transition out of leadership, and the church would begin looking for his successor. As part of the transition strategy, Pastor Doug wanted to ensure that our church would avoid organizational drift away from our foundations both in mission and in method. Resources on mission drift were secured and supplied to all the staff and elders. As part of the team that identifies and shapes what each of our congregations would be hearing on Sunday mornings in the pulpit, I suggested a study on Revelation 2–3 and Jesus' letters to the churches. In my mind each of these letters identified a specific caution that Jesus would give to the churches and a way forward for them. It was a perfect series to call us to greater fidelity as a church and faithfulness in avoiding moral, theological, and methodological drift. However, I failed to account for one thing in my recollection of the content of Revelation 2–3: the pastors.

Where I had thought of each of these letters as an indictment against the church (mostly) and a solution (repentance) to fix what ailed them, I failed to see that there was a person looming large over the churches speaking directly to the leaders. His words, in fact, were the content of the letters to each church, but he wasn't speaking as a detached or distant CEO giving pragmatic instruction on how to fix a branch or two of the spiritual franchises. And it wasn't Jesus just tossing out leadership memos

to these congregations about how to do better and try harder. He was writing to pastors. Real leaders, real individuals who were given the charge to lead local congregations in actual local communities. These letters are not Jesus' take on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

When I saw the seven letters (and the entire book of Revelation for that matter) in this light, I realized Jesus was drawing close to suffering, insufficient, floundering pastors and churches. In the magnificence of his all-surpassing power and authority, he stands near pastors and churches to remind them of his ultimate victory over the cosmic powers that would undo them. In the triumph of the resurrection, he draws near as the “faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5 CSB). When he draws near to the apostle John on Patmos in Revelation 1, he appears in radiant glory. There is no question the vision of the resurrected, vindicated, glorified Jesus was to demonstrate his supreme and matchless authority over all contenders. If you're on the opposing side of his glory, you should be terrified. But if you're a “brother and partner in the affliction, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus,” then Jesus showing up in glory for you is a welcome sight (Rev 1:9 CSB). He's truly the older brother coming to the rescue of his younger siblings being abused by a cowardly bully. In a cosmic sense, thinking about the universal church, that's really comforting. But there's a locality to this vision as well; don't miss it.

Seven cities are mentioned. Seven communities are identified as the places where Jesus' letter will land. John is commanded to “write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Rev 1:11). While the number seven symbolizes the universal scope of this letter for all the churches, we can't look past the specific referents in Jesus' command to John. He has seven specific—in space and time—communities and churches in view. He shows up to say something to Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and

Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea. He shows up to be something for these churches. He wants them to see that he is enough.

One element of the glorious visage of Jesus is described as a “mystery” that needs further explanation. John sees seven stars and seven golden lampstands. Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand. He stands amid the seven lampstands. And without a point of reference, we’re left to guess at what the significance of this placement is. Thankfully we’re not left to speculate.

Jesus explains the mystery in this way: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Rev 1:20). Jesus stands in the midst of the churches; he holds the pastors in his right hand. Now it might seem a stretch to some to interpret these “angels” as pastors, but each of the following seven letters to specific local churches is written to the “angel” of that local church. If the stars or angels are not human individuals, it reduces the particular impact of how Jesus’ glory is good news for specific communities and specific pastors in the midst of a hostile cultural context. I’m of the opinion (thankfully with others, notably Peter Leithart³) that Jesus isn’t just speaking to some guardian angel or that the stars and angels are a spiritualized reference to the church. Plainly, the angel is a messenger, a pastor.

Jesus makes it plain where his attention is focused. He cares for his church. He’s standing in the center of his people. Jesus cares for his pastors. They are held in his right hand. The letters are personal addresses from Jesus to these pastors about who he is and who they are. Underpinning every letter is the fact that the pastors are held in the dominant hand of authority and care of Jesus Christ himself. He begins each address confronting the pastors with a specific facet of his identity, directly pointed to the need and lack of “enoughness” that each pastor has. These letters are about how Jesus is enough for each of them, in their particular needs.

Make no mistake: Jesus will say hard words. He will confront sin and apathy. Jesus will get in the face of one or two and tell them they make him sick. He applies a healing word to the wounds of two pastors who are down on the mat after taking a beating from the enemy. Their weakness doesn't repel Jesus. He doesn't give up on any one of them.

He won't give up on you either. In fact, like Jesus' victorious promise to them, Jesus' expectation is that you will be victorious too. Yes: you, pastor. He's enough to see us home to the end. Each letter concludes with a promise and motivation to endure and press on trusting him. "To the one who conquers" (Rev 2:7) is an invitation to remember that we belong to Jesus and, "as I also conquered," so he will see to our victory as well (Rev 3:21).

These seven letters are love letters from Jesus to pastors, and the more I think about it, the more that seems right. Certainly, they aren't syrupy and sappy romantic letters, but they are nonetheless evidences of Jesus' care and concern for the pastors who lead his church. The introduction to the book of Revelation reminds us that it is from "him who loves *us* and has freed *us* from our sins by his blood" (Rev 1:5). These letters are the very Word of God for pastors today, like me and you, striving to be enough and yet forgetting to remember that we have a Savior who is absolutely enough. And you, pastor, belong to him!

So, because Jesus is enough, and because pastors belong to him, "let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says" Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 CSB).

TO THE ANGEL of the church in Ephesus write: “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

REVELATION 2:1-7