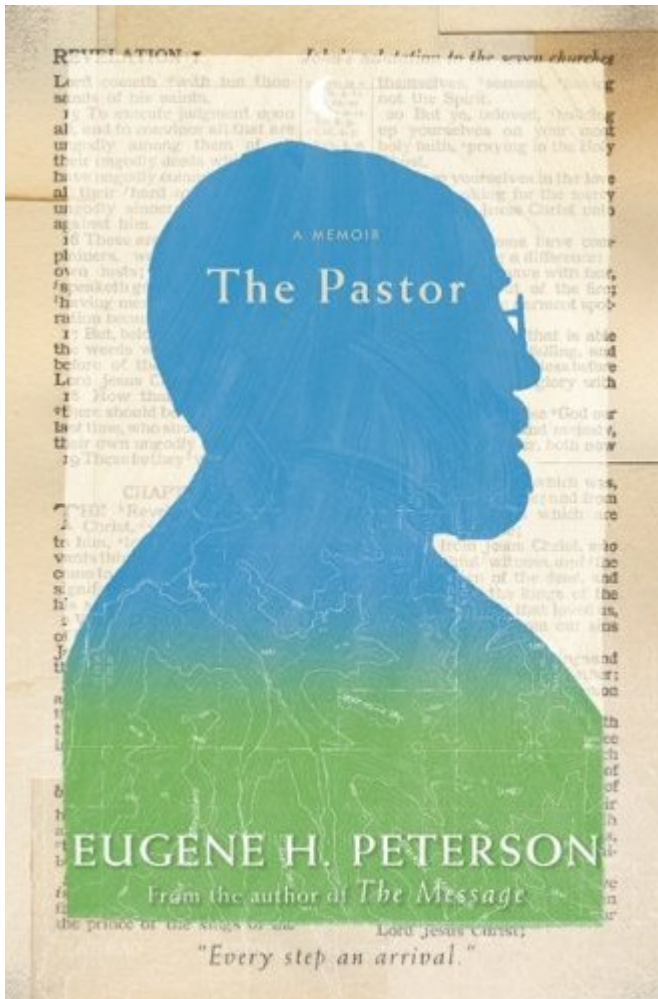


Years of learning and unlearning

By [Debra Bendis](#)

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In Review



The Pastor

by Eugene H. Peterson

HarperOne

Eugene Peterson's new memoir, *The Pastor*, will be out in February (*Century* subscribers can read the [excerpt](#) from the book in the February 8 issue.) If any pastor has claimed the vocation, it's Peterson, who has grounded and inspired pastors for many years with books that include [Under the Unpredictable Plant](#) and [The Contemplative Pastor](#). Peterson's wisdom and confident delivery suggest someone who's always known himself and been confident in his vocation.

But according to the book blurb, it was only after 29 years in the pulpit that Peterson came to realize what being a pastor was really about. It wasn't, he realized, about the number of people who filled his pews each week. Instead, it was about

paying attention and calling attention to "what is going on right now" between men and women, with each other and with God. I want to give witness to this way of understanding pastor. . . .I would like to provide dignity to this essentially modest and often obscure way of life in the kingdom of God.

When we respond to a call and enter a vocation, we don't like to think that it will take this long for that vocation to form us--29 years and more. We wrestle with so many other questions--what we'll accomplish, who we'll influence, how the denomination will appreciate us, how we'll balance our career with that of a spouse and with a family, how we'll see our careers progress. Even if we proceed with a fine-tuned sense of humility and are willing to be taught, we can't really imagine needing an entire lifetime to learn pastoring and--as Peterson says in the book--to unlearn things.

What about Peterson's insights for today's pastors? Do we have a new set of challenges that makes Peterson an appreciated guide in all things pastoral, an inspirational writer, yet perhaps not quite alert to the technologies, tensions and pastorates of a new century?