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**What we can learn from ‘Ted Lasso’**

**Key points:**

* **The three-season emotional rollercoaster is both a sitcom about an American who knows nothing about soccer, coaching in the Premiere League, and an extended 34-episode philosophical and theological treatise disguised as a comedy.**
* **Christian perfection is the hopeless optimism of Ted Lasso. Although we acknowledge we won’t be fully perfect in this life, we always strive to get closer to the good.**
* **True leadership in an itinerant system means paving the way for the ministry of those who will come after you and nurturing, not your vision, but the vision the community casts for itself.**

Chase Crickenberger. July 31, 2023
Photo courtesy of the author.

**Commentaries**

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When we started our adventure with the main character of the Apple TV+ program “[Ted Lasso](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10986410/)” in August 2020, we had no idea what to expect. Perhaps we were drawn to the show by our love for English “football” or for the titular character who first appeared in a 2013 Super Bowl commercial as a fictional American coach for the Tottingham Hotspurs.

Not only did the show warm America’s heart to what is, by far, the most popular sport globally, but it also gave us hope and a reason to feel good in a world that seemed to be falling apart amid the chaos of our quickly changing reality.

However, I didn’t expect the show’s impact on me personally. Nor did I realize that I would be in for a three-season emotional rollercoaster that was both a sitcom about an American who knows nothing about soccer, coaching in the Premiere League, and an extended 34-episode philosophical and theological treatise disguised as a comedy. From the first episode, we were introduced to a cast of characters who were real people with real problems. We watched them transform and demonstrate what it truly means to strive toward perfection.

The proverbial strings began to connect for me about halfway through the series finale when Roy Kent, my personal favorite, finally asked to join the inner sanctum we’d come to know as “The Diamond Dogs.” After a curse-filled rant about wanting to be a different person, he posed a simple question: “Can a person change?” Assistant Coach Beard said (slightly paraphrasing here), “There are perfect movies, perfect foods, perfect trees … but perfection in people is not possible.” Then Leslie, the docile assistant to the club owner, responded, “The best you can do is to keep asking for help and accepting it when you can. And if you keep on doing that, you’ll always be moving toward ‘better.’”

When we talk about Christian perfection as Methodists, is that not exactly what Christ calls us to do? Our idea of perfection is about waking every day, seeking God’s help, and striving to move ourselves toward being better Christians. Christian perfection is the hopeless optimism of Ted Lasso. Although we acknowledge we won’t be fully perfect in this life, we always endeavor to get closer to the good.

As the episode ended, Ted and the rest of the coaching staff at FC Richmond finally saw the draft of the book Trent Crimm was writing about the titular coach. The initial title was “The Lasso Way,” explaining what made Ted Lasso’s coaching style unique. However, after reading over the initial draft, Ted gave the book back to Trent. On the cover, he scratched out the name “The Lasso Way” and replaced it with “The Richmond Way.” He included a note that read, “One suggestion: I would change the title. It’s not about me. It never was. Ted.”

Although we focused on Ted’s effect on the team, it was never about Ted. It was always about the team. It was about people learning to love one another and the world around them. The victories belonged to a team of dedicated players. Ted merely helped them see their worth, potential and strength.

I truly feel Christ calls us to be like Ted Lasso. Our role as pastors is to help our communities see them as Christ sees them. We are called to take ragtag teams of Christians and teach them that it’s OK to be vulnerable, to mourn and cry, and to celebrate. To do that, we need the strength, courage and humility to say, “It was never about us as pastors.”

Ted is a very static character. His worldview does not significantly shift over three seasons. However, he experiences human pain, loss, grief, loneliness, anxiety and depression. While he works toward perfection in every episode, he still battles the demons and the blessings of what it means to be human. As pastors and as Christians, we need to stop thinking of ourselves as leaders at the front of the pack and start thinking of ourselves more like Ted regards those around him.

We need to see ourselves as people called to shine a light in the darkness and to help others strive for perfection. And when people fall and err, we are called to pick them up and walk with them on the journey. As pastors, we need to let the voices of our laity rise triumphantly above our own. In contrast, the laity are called to bring people onto the team, to forgive burdensome grudges they’ve held onto for years, and to love their community with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Ted Lasso has a lot to teach us as Christians. True leadership means paving the way for the ministry of those who will come after you and nurturing, not your vision, but the vision the community casts for itself. The mission is always about the community and the people.

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