

Collin Hansen and Jeff Robinson Sr., eds. *Faithful Endurance: The Joy of Shepherding People for a Lifetime*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019. 159 pp., \$15.99.

Faithful Endurance: The Joy of Shepherding People for a Lifetime is a compilation of essays designed to encourage the disheartened pastor to “walk the road of sacrificial love with confidence and joy” (p. 12). The editors of this power packed little volume are Collin Hansen and Jeff Robinson Sr. They have assembled a group of twelve tested men who have experienced the pain of ministry and who can now ably and aptly share their nuggets of gold that have come forth through the refining fires of pastoral ministry. Each chapter opens with a letter posing a question on some pastoral difficulty that every enduring pastor has or will face (ministry listlessness, when to leave a church, stale preaching, criticism, protecting your wife, rest, etc.). Then each veteran pastor will offer wise counsel to the anonymous pastor (*Discontented Shepherd, Going Broke, Bored with Myself, Pastor in the Flames, Deserted Shepherd*, et al). The book concludes with a Q&A interview with enduring pastor John MacArthur.

Each chapter was of benefit, but three resonated personally. Bryan Chapell’s *My Preaching Always Sounds the Same* rang especially true, for what preacher has not bemoaned the fact of sermon sameness? While many simply rush through the process of sermon preparation, Chapell urges the minister to be cognizant of *congregation sensitivity* and offers four solutions: *determine significance* (for the congregation) *as well as meaning, discern burdens as well as facts, identify specifics as well as principles, and preach the fullness of the gospel* (36-39). The chapter titled *I Would Never Have Attended the Church I Now Lead* by Tom Ascol might be amusing if it were not true, for many a man of God has found himself in exactly that precarious situation. Ascol reminds the minister who finds himself in this situation that “pastoring a disorderly, needy church can make that calling especially challenging. By God’s grace, as you embrace the challenge, you will put the power of the gospel on display” (60). *My Critics Are a Burden to My Wife* by Juan Sanchez tugs at the heart of every married minister, for how many have not seen the devastating effect that well-intentioned dragons can have on one’s wife. “Wifeology” may be one of the most important disciplines ministers can master, “If we are to live with our wife “according to knowledge,” we must become students, majoring in the subject of ‘her’” (64). Your wife’s primary role is to be your helper, your wife’s secondary role is to be a mother (in this she will help protect you from sacrificing your family on the altar of ministry), and whatever you expect of church members, you can expect of her (65). Sanchez rightly sees that the minister must protect the church and his family: *protect the church from and for yourself, protect the church from and for your wife, and protect the church from and for your children* (67-68).

There are several insights that will prove beneficial to the minister for a lifetime. Amid the fray, the preacher must remember that while his wife is always in his corner, she is never to be in the ring (63). Regarding growth in our heart during the time of trial, doubt, and tension, Scott Patty asserts, “God will not orchestrate circumstances in my life that do not require faith” (106). A prophetic word for the prophet under his juniper tree, Jeff Robinson states, “I think my answer is as simple as this: I’m called to be a pastor. And unless I am morally disqualified – when I fail to be the man Paul calls for in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 in an unrepentant and egregious manner – I’m called to press on in ministry in spite of significant evidence to the contrary. We serve an invisible kingdom whose progress is often equally invisible” (129). It was refreshing to see John MacArthur’s perspective on studying the Word for a sermon or for devotion – “I’ve never really been able to see the difference between studying the scripture to

truly understand what it means so I can communicate it to somebody else and a devotional approach” (140). One final treasured tidbit from MacArthur regarding the call to ministry and being content where God has placed you – “You take care of the depth of your ministry, let God take care of the breadth of it” (143).

A few observations of note. Dan Doriani alleges, “If Jack’s church found a pastor bent on leadership, he would inevitably be less devoted to preaching or shepherding. No one has the time to be a strong preacher, organizer, and shepherd even if he has all three abilities” (45). While one may affirm the latter part of that quote, is it not possible that Jack’s pastor can provide much of his leadership through the ministry of the pulpit? Then, while wisdom certainly dictates variety in preaching (expository preaching through books and/or topics), surprisingly, Bryan Chapell asserts that “sticking to long expository series from books that are not expansive in their subject coverage hinders the necessary life preparation” (32). It would seem since all Scripture is God-breathed and sufficient, that no one should refer to Scripture as “hindering” in any way. It might be better to refer to some books with the positive “more beneficial” as necessary to life preparation. Finally, Sanchez maintains that the pastor’s wife is simply a church member, stating that some churches feel they are getting a two for one deal with the pastor and his wife, and that some pastors fall for this “bargain” (65). No disagreement here, but the minister and his wife must be aware that rare is the church that at least does not have some expectation of the pastor’s wife, overt or hidden – right or wrong – most churches eventually default to some expectation whether stated from the beginning or not, especially if things are not going well in the church.

The entire body of Christ would do well to read this succinct, yet special volume on pastoral ministry. It would benefit the pew, the pulpit and the academy and will prove beneficial for: 1) the inexperienced pastor who needs a clear and practical “heads-up”, 2) the seasoned pastor who has endured the fiery trial or is in the dark valley, who needs a gentle reminder that he is not alone, 3) every pastor’s wife because, not often does a pastoral ministries book come along that can benefit the pastor’s wife, and 4) the person in the pew, who may have their eyes opened to the plight of the pulpit and the parsonage. It is worth noting that while the subtitle speaks about joy, conversely the book addresses dryness, criticism, doubt, desertion, burnout, etc. Enduring faithfully means persevering through the pain; it is ironic, but nonetheless true that the issues of ministry do not have to rob one of joy. In his book, *The Root of the Righteous*, A.W. Tozer writes, “It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply.” This book reminds us of that hurt as well as the joy and is necessary reading for every preacher that desires to endure faithfully for a lifetime, for it will comfort, convict, inform and edify.

Tony A. Rogers
Southside Baptist Church, Bowie, Texas