



*Edited by*  
Collin Hansen  
& Jeff Robinson Sr.

# Faithful ENDURANCE

The Joy of Shepherding

People for a Lifetime

“I love this book! It is nearly impossible to overstate the wealth of seasoned, practical, pastoral wisdom that can be found in every chapter. Being called to be a pastor is a high honor, and being commissioned to preach the gospel is a beautiful thing, but the life of a pastor always includes seasons of hardship. Each chapter of this book speaks into those seasons with the tenderness of compassion, the grace of understanding, and the helpfulness of truth spoken in love. If you are a pastor, get this book, read it with an open heart, and then keep it near, because there will be seasons when you will reach for it again and find it to be your friend.”

**Paul David Tripp**, President, Paul Tripp Ministries; author, *New Morning Mercies* and *Suffering*

“In ministry, you need company—and the wiser the company, the better. Not all of us enjoy mutually encouraging pastoral friendships with the likes of the contributors to this volume, but here they welcome you into their own lives and experiences and doubts and heartbreaks and trials. In so doing, they offer counsel and hope for those in ministry. And we all need that.”

**J. Ligon Duncan III**, Chancellor, CEO, and John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Pastors get worn down, discouraged, depleted, and depressed. This short but pastorally rich book will prove to be a spiritual tonic for pastors. I recommend reading and meditating on the essays in this book, which will provide strength and solace for the journey.”

**Thomas R. Schreiner**, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“The apostle Paul wrote, ‘Follow me, as I follow Christ.’ We grow not only by learning true concepts but also by following faithful people. In *Faithful Endurance*, a team of veteran pastors invites younger pastors to follow them into the buffetings and temptations of ministry, offering the path of wisdom that the Lord faithfully provides for every new generation. I wish this fine book had been available to me when I was a young pastor.”

**Ray Ortlund**, Senior Pastor, Immanuel Church, Nashville, Tennessee

“Pastoral ministry often feels like a labyrinth filled with uncertain turns and innumerable blind spots. If ventured on alone, the journey is marked by constant frustration and despair. But if you are joined by a friend, especially a wise one, the journey is not only more enjoyable but also more likely to result in safe passage. While reading *Faithful Endurance*, I felt accompanied by wise friends who imparted insightful wisdom that I trust will help me and any other pastor to remain faithful until the end.”

**Garrett Kell**, Lead Pastor, Del Ray Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia

“Many pastors face unanticipated troubles—ministry discouragement, constant criticism, devotional dryness, or feelings of inadequacy and failure. They need seasoned leaders to speak directly to them in the midst of these challenging situations. And they need these leaders to share the wisdom they’ve learned from God’s Word and their own similar experiences. In other words, they need the stabilizing encouragement of this book. I wish I had had it years ago, and I gladly commend it to fellow pastors.”

**Drew Hunter**, Teaching Pastor, Zionsville Fellowship, Zionsville, Indiana; author, *Made for Friendship*

# Faithful Endurance

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# Faithful Endurance

The Joy of Shepherding People for a Lifetime

Edited by Collin Hansen  
and Jeff Robinson Sr.

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For my pastors—  
may God grant us strength and faith  
to finish the race together.

Collin Hansen

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For Harry Reeder and Tony Rose,  
two ministry heroes who have shown me what it means  
to endure in faithfulness over the long haul  
through many dangers, toils, and snares.

Jeff Robinson Sr.





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# Introduction

Collin Hansen

Pastors and other elders have been called to one task not entrusted to every Christian—teaching. But in other ways the path of faithful endurance in following Christ looks the same for the shepherds as for the sheep. And that means that Jesus calls them to do what he did for them. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15) so that he may take it up again (10:17). Indeed, “greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (15:13).

Peter, that rock upon which Christ promised to build his church (Matt. 16:18), neither understood nor initially agreed with Jesus on this point. When Jesus told him that the Christ must suffer many things, including death, Peter rebuked him. But Jesus rebuked him in return, going so far as to call him Satan, the accuser or adversary (16:21–23). Jesus explained to a crowd, to Peter, and to his other disciples what enduring faithfulness looks like: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:34–35). Even then, when Peter promised Jesus that he would lay down his life for

his friend, Jesus knew better: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times” (John 13:37–38).

But Jesus restored his friend Peter. And by his death and resurrection he restores us also, to fellowship with God and to service in his church. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5). In him, though, we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37) on the march to heaven. One day we will see the Shepherd of our souls face to face (1 Cor. 13:12).

Until then, Jesus tells us what direction the road of faithful endurance will take us—for all of us as Christians, not least those of us who lead the church. We give our soul, our life, our all. This sacrifice is the essence of love, as the apostle John taught us: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16).

The essays in this book will help you walk that road of sacrificial love with confidence and joy. It is a profound responsibility to shepherd people for a lifetime. Each chapter begins with a question that reflects a scenario commonly faced by pastors. And the answer, from a veteran pastor, seeks to apply godly wisdom in response. We hope that this dialogue will help you “run with endurance the race that is set before us” by “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2).

# Ministry Has Left Me Spiritually Listless

Tim Keller

Dear Pastor Tim,

Last Sunday I was struck by Paul's words in Philippians 4 that he had learned the secret to contentment. The Lord has given me a great place to serve, and I think it's going reasonably well. I enjoy the deep study of Scripture that comes with preaching every week, and I probably spend at least fifty hours per week on church work.

I continue to grow in my knowledge of the things of God, but my devotional life is lifeless. I'm just not content. I fret a lot over things, especially whether the church is flourishing under my leadership, whether I'm working hard enough, and whether I know enough. I'll admit that though things are going well at the church, I'm not thrilled that other churches around us are growing while we seem to have plateaued. The church has done fairly well under my leadership, but to be frank, I expected more.

Yes, I realize I have much to be content over, but no amount of “success” ever seems to do it for me. Why am I feeling this way? What has left me feeling so listless, even subtly bitter?

Faithfully your friend,

Discontented Shepherd



Dear Discontented Shepherd,<sup>1</sup>

I spent forty-two years in ordained vocational ministry. Many who started with me didn't get to the finish line. It's a grievous percentage. One of the main reasons so many didn't last, I think, is because no one warned them about the ways ministry can tempt one with pride.

This is where Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 have been so helpful to me as a pastor. Paul—the very apostle trained in theology and for ministry by the actual risen Christ—warns us that theological training and life in ministry can lead to conceit if you fail to cooperate with Christ's gracious intervention:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses,

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1. This chapter is adapted from Tim Keller, “3 Ways Ministry Can Make You Conceited,” The Gospel Coalition, July 5, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-ways-ministry-can-make-you-conceited/>. Used by permission of the author.

insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Here are three ways ministry can make you conceited unless God intervenes. Be warned.

### **Theological Knowledge Can Puff You Up**

First, there's the conceit of theological knowledge. Now you might think, *It's a stretch to say Paul is arguing that theological knowledge leads to conceit.* But elsewhere he says, "We know that 'We all possess knowledge.' But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:1-2 NIV).

Here he's explicitly talking about theological knowledge. Some in Corinth had the right theological knowledge about meat offered to idols, but what did it lead to? Being puffed up. He's saying something simple. Knowing the truth has a tendency to inflate you. You become self-involved, proud of your knowledge and insight. Love, on the other hand, is self-emptying. Love is saying, "Your needs are more important than mine." But being puffed up means that you become more self-involved, you become proud, you become proud of your knowledge, you become proud of your insight. And Paul says that it doesn't have to be that way, but the fact is that it very often is.

In his exposition of Ephesians 6, I think the words of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones are helpful:

Whenever you allow your relationship to the truth to become purely theoretical and academic, you're falling into the grip of Satan. . . .

The moment in your study you cease to come under the power of the truth, you have become a victim of the Devil. If you can study the Bible without being searched and examined and humbled, without being lifted up and made to praise God, or moved with sorrow over what God has endured in you, or amazed at the beauty and wisdom of what Christ has done for



you, if you do not feel as much of a desire to sing when you're alone in your study as when you're standing in the pulpit, you are in bad shape. And you should always feel something in this power.<sup>2</sup>

Lloyd-Jones proceeds to identify the marks of someone who has learned to master the Bible as a set of mere information, not extraordinary power. One mark is that you become a spiritual crank. A spiritual crank is someone always complaining about relatively fine shades of doctrinal distinctions, always denouncing others in arguments over Bible translations or denouncing people on the wrong side of the latest theological controversy. A spiritual crank treats the Word of God as something you use, not something that uses you. He's puffed up on intellectual pride and his theological tribe.

### **Ministry Can Become a False Identity**

The second conceit comes from a false identity created by ministry. You will tend to identify personally with your ministry so much so that its success (or lack thereof) becomes your success (or lack thereof). Once you begin to identify in this way, you'll create a false identity based on your performance as a minister. If you don't understand this point, it will be one of your main battlegrounds in the years ahead. What do I mean by false identity?

It can manifest itself in at least four ways:

1. *Success*: Any of us can build a false identity based on circumstances and performance. Every single Christian struggles with a false identity. Every non-Christian has a false identity. Those of us in full-time ministry will face the sting of success one way or another. When people come to your church, you're going to feel like they are affirming you, and when people leave your church, you're going to feel like it's a personal attack.

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2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Knowledge Puffeth Up," in *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), 180.

2. *Criticism*: If your ministry becomes your false identity, you won't be able to handle criticism. Criticism will come and be so traumatic, because it questions how good a pastor you are. Criticism says, "You know, your preaching really isn't very good. . . . I want my preacher to be better." It feels like a personal attack. The criticism either devastates you, or you dismiss it and don't grow from it.
3. *Cowardice*: If your ministry becomes your false identity, you will succumb to cowardice. There are two kinds of cowardice. There's true cowardice—being afraid to rock the boat or to offend the people who give the most money to the church or to preach a word that turns young people off. That's true cowardice. But there's another kind of cowardice that I call "counterfeit" cowardice. This is the cowardice of being too abrasive, of being too harsh, of running people off and then saying, "See, I'm valiant for truth." This also comes from identifying with your ministry.
4. *Comparisons*: One last sign that you've fallen into a false identity is that you cannot stand comparisons. You get envious when you see others succeeding because you don't think they work as hard as you do or are not as theologically astute as you are. Everything is coming up roses for them in their ministry, and that bothers you.

Pastor, there's nothing worse than identifying with your ministry. And by the way, if you don't think that's going to be a lifelong struggle, you don't know your own heart.

### **Ministry Can Make You Outwardly Focused**

When you speak to people about God, you have two options: commune with God, or act like you commune with God. Since the minister's job is to tell people how great God is and how wonderful the Christian life can be, his life needs to reflect it. So you either have to be close to God as you minister, or you have to act close to God. Either you truly learn how to commune with God, or you learn how

to fake it: you talk as if you're a lot closer to God than you actually are. And not only do people start to think that, but you start to think it too. This can be devastating for your heart. That's what is so horribly dangerous about ministry.

On Jesus's last night with the disciples, he said one of them would betray him (John 13:21). It's interesting to consider how the disciples responded. They all looked around and asked who this person was. In fact, after Jesus told them that it was the one he would give bread to, they still didn't get it. You know why? Because Judas didn't look any different than they did. Outwardly, he was an effective minister, but inwardly, there was nothing there. He took care of his outward life more than his inward life. Jonathan Edwards, in his great book *Charity and Its Fruits*, talks about the fact that God used Judas even though he wasn't saved. We don't want that to be our legacy in ministry.

But here's where hypocrisy starts. Ministry is either going to make you a far better Christian or a far worse Christian than you would have otherwise been. It's going to make you a hard, pharisaical hypocrite, or it's going to turn you into a softer, more tender person, because it forces you to go to the throne of grace and to beg the Lord for help in your weakness. The ministry will either drive you to him or drive you away from him. Like Judas, you choose what life you care for.

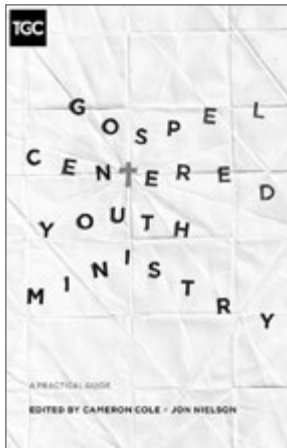
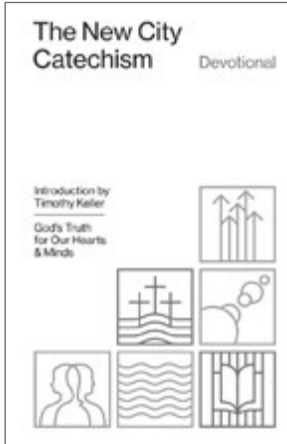
## **Overcome Your Conceits**

So how do we overcome these conceits? Remember Paul's situation in 2 Corinthians. He's facing false apostles and teachers who are saying he doesn't have the credentials to be a true apostle. Paul counters that he does have the credentials—but not the kind we would expect. He inverts all the categories. Instead of boasting about his theological knowledge, great success, or picture-perfect outward life, he boasts in insults, hardships, and being run out of town on a rail.

This is how he contends that God is truly with him. He tells us to look at all the things God has done to bring him to his knees.

Pastor, consider all the things God has done to break your pride. Look at all the ways he has brought you to the end of yourself so that you would cling to him more tightly. Let all your failures and disappointments and weaknesses drive you like a nail into the love of God. Only by embracing them will you ever become a true minister and make it to the finish line.

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*“This book will prove to be a spiritual tonic for pastors.”*

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This book offers pastors examples of long-term faithfulness in ministry and practical wisdom from veteran pastors for real-life issues.

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“The contributors welcome you into their own lives and experiences and doubts and heartbreaks and trials.”

J. LIGON DUNCAN III

Chancellor, CEO, and John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

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