

Shepherd's Balm

**Monday Morning Calls
to the Shepherds of God's Flock**

Richard Earl

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Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Dedication

To the pastor who toils joyfully in obscurity or wishes he/she could.

Thanks

To my family

My amazing wife, Faith, who believes in me and tells me the truth- faithfully.

Micah, Rachel and Rebekah who make me proud to be a father.

Mom and Dad who gave me more than I could have asked for.

Acknowledgments

His Thousand Hills Christian Retreat

Ed and Margie Hartman my mentors

Jess Bousa for believing

Tricia Purcell for caring

The flock at Mountainside Church

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Shepherds Balm: Monday Morning Calls to the Shepherds of
God's Flock

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Shepherd's Balm

Monday Morning Calls
to the Shepherds of God's Flock

Richard Earl

Preface

Great is the need now and always for sources of encouragement, wisdom and challenge in the lives of those who give their all to caring for, teaching and leading the sheep otherwise known as the Church of Jesus Christ. I offer this small volume as a means for pastors to evaluate and meditate upon their work and lives, in light of our common experiences in ministry.

Shepherds have many responsibilities in caring for the sheep. It is their job to ensure their health, safety and welfare in what could be perilous circumstances. Among their tools are the shepherds staff, slingshot, and oil - used to anoint the heads of sheep to protect them from sunstroke. Earthly shepherds are in need of protection too, and that can only come from the Great Shepherd Himself, hence the title Shepherd's Balm.

The life of the present day pastor is filled with perils and opportunities, and they sometimes come dressed in the same clothes. Temptations, dangers, persecutions and conflicts can be, in retrospect, merely ways for God to shake us out of our present state and get us ready for one that is more

productive. Surely he could keep us from these distressing experiences, but He does not. He seems oblivious to our plight when in reality He is making room for His grace to be sufficient, and for us to learn a new reliance upon Him, casting off old ways.

This volume is not meant to coddle or to soothe. It is not a bulwark against the forces we find within and without trying to tear us down. Rather, it is a dressing for our wounded and weary spirits to make us ready once again for the battle, the good fight of faith. The thoughts contained here are not naïve, but potent and time-tested, many coming from the old masters, and some from newly emerging voices.

The format of this book is quite simple. You will find an encouraging or challenging message about ministry followed by a verse of scripture and lines for journaling your reflections. You will also find images, brief quotes and exercises throughout the volume which are intended to provoke further thought and action.

The format reflects a deep respect for you and your ministry. I have limited reflective questions to just a few as I realize that you know how to make best use of this material in your own life. There is also plenty of room for freeform journaling if that is helpful to you.

It is my hope that this little volume will serve as a healing salve of sorts on Monday mornings, or at any time in the life of the shepherd. The individual entries are arranged in no real order, but have been

given headings to distinguish the root issue addressed in each. There are 52 to provide balm for every Monday morning for a year with space provided for personal notes as the Lord speaks to you through these pages.

I have offered little comment to the devotional pieces, attempting to only offer words that hold weight, and hopefully speak for themselves. Some of the language is antiquated. If you struggle with a passage, stay at it, and you will learn its rhythms. I have discovered that the treasure is worth the mining.

You will notice that most of the authors assume the pastor is male. This can be attributed to their time in history. I have not corrected the language, but have not made an effort to exclude female ministers or ministry leaders. These pages speak to you as well as to your male counterparts.

Many of the authors contained in this volume are not widely known or read today. What I have discovered in reading their works is that while so much in our culture has changed, even more has remained the same in terms of shepherding God's people. People are still people, and just as we can see ourselves in the pages of ancient scripture, we can also find our likeness in the experiences of pastors whose work was done a century ago or more.

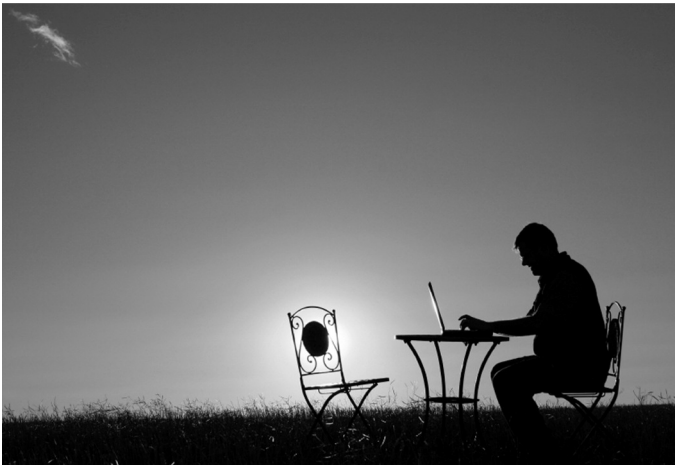
You may in a sense feel that certain entries found here have the effect of contradicting one another. This has to do with seeing things from both sides. For

some of us, the weakness is severity, and so we must be encouraged to love our people more tenderly. Others are guilty of appeasing the flock, and need to be exhorted to more prophetic boldness.

This volume contains messages for God's ministers from many voices and from many ages. It has been my joy to collect their works over the past 25 years. It is my hope that, although some of these works I have drawn from are out of print and out of "style", you will search them out further and dig more deeply into the caverns of their wisdom. Most of what you find here could not be found with a Google search. You can't Google everything!

I recently made a new friend who pastors a church in Michigan. He formerly worked for a large Christian used bookseller where he would wander through their attic warehouse on breaks and rummage through the boxes full of treasure. On one such foray he was amazed to discover several boxes of three ring binders full of sermons diligently typed out single spaced and covered with copious handwritten notes in the margins. He looked for the name of the author everywhere, but never found it. He recently was able to obtain the binders as the inventory of the warehouse was sold. He continues his search to find the anonymous pastor. This book is written for that shepherd and millions of others like him who will never have their work published except in the hearts of their people. This is for the shepherd

who toils in obscurity with his or her hands faithfully on the plow, and not looking back. Godspeed!



*“He who runs from God in the morning
will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.”*

—John Bunyan

Great Reward

A minister, who does his work with an eye single to God's glory, leaving everything else behind, receives the best things the world affords. A multitude of people become his relatives and friends. Fathers and mothers are as proud of him as though he were a member of their family. Old men look on him lovingly as on a son. Young men look up to him reverently as to a father. Men of his own age love him as a brother. A large circle feels that in him they have a comrade and friend. He enjoys free access to many homes, houses and lands are his, not by legal title but by spiritual prescription. Appreciation, gratitude, affection, these are the gold, frankincense, and myrrh constantly poured out before him. If love is the best thing in the world, then the faithful pastor gets more of the Earth's richest treasure than any other man.

To be sure, he will not be loved by everybody. Jesus was careful to state that the good things would

be accompanied by tribulations. These also are part of the minister's reward. The Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes will always be against him. Men not bad of heart, but of stupid ear will misunderstand him and misrepresent him. The idler will gossip about him and the ungrateful will return evil for good. Those possessed of demons will openly attack him. All this is to be expected. Is the pupil to be above his teacher, and the servant above his master? Think it not strange, young man, when this fiery experience overtakes you. Do not be thrown into panic because all men do not speak well of you. Do not cry and sob when you meet with opposition in your parish. Do your duty and you will stir up trouble, but you will never be left without faithful hearts to love you. When you go into Gethsemane, friends will remain praying at the gate, and if you die on the cross you will carry into heaven with you the affectionate devotion of many loyal hearts. There is nothing more beautiful on this earth than the love of a parish for a faithful pastor.

– Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, pp. 180-182

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life.*

– *Psalms 23:6 (NKJV)*

EXERCISE

Take time right now to thank the Lord for the privilege of serving him in ministry. Recall times when you complained of the way being hard and ask the Lord's forgiveness.



“If we think we are undervalued, let us weigh ourselves in God's balances, and we shall easily bear the slight.”

–RC Chapman

Busy

The one piece of mail certain to go unread into my wastebasket is a letter addressed to the “busy pastor.” Not that the phrase doesn’t describe me at times, but I refuse to give my attention to someone who encourages what is worst in me. I’m not arguing the accuracy of the adjective; I am, though, contesting the way it’s used to flatter and express sympathy.

“The poor man,” we say. He’s so devoted to his flock; the work is endless, and he sacrifices himself so unstintingly. But the word “busy” is the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal. It is not devotion but defection. The adjective busy set as a modifier to pastor should sound to our ears like adulterous to characterize a wife or embezzling to describe the banker. It is an outrageous scandal, a blasphemous affront.

I become busy for two reasons; both are ignoble: I am busy because I am vain. I want to appear

important. Significant. What better way than to be busy? The incredible hours, the crowded schedule, and the heavy demands on my time are proof to myself – and to all who will notice – that I am important. If I go into a doctor's office and find there's no one waiting, and I see through a half-open door the doctor reading a book, I wonder if he's any good. A good doctor will have people lined up waiting to see him; a good doctor will not have time to read a book. Although I grumble about waiting my turn in the busy doctor's office, I'm also impressed with his importance.

Such experiences affect me. I live in a society in which crowded schedules and harassed conditions are evidence of importance so I develop a crowded schedule and harassed conditions. When others notice, they acknowledge my significance, and my vanity is fed.

I am busy because I am lazy. I indolently let others decide what I will do instead of resolutely deciding myself. I let people who do not understand the work of the pastor write the agenda for my day's work because I am too slipshod to write it myself. The pastor is a shadow figure in these people's minds, a marginal person vaguely connected with matters of God and goodwill. Anything remotely religious or somehow well-intentioned can be properly assigned to the pastor.

It was a favorite theme of CS Lewis that only lazy people work hard by lazily abdicating the essential

work of deciding and directing, establishing values and setting goals, other people do it for us; then we find ourselves frantically, at the last minute, trying to satisfy a half dozen different demands on our time, none of which is essential to our vocation, to stave off the disaster of disappointing someone.

But if I vainly crowd my day with conspicuous activity or let others fill my day with imperious demands, I don't have time to do my proper work, the work to which I have been called. How can I lead people into the quiet place beside the still waters if I am in perpetual motion? How can I persuade a person to live by faith and not by works if I had to juggle my schedule constantly to make everything fit into place?

...The trick, of course, is to get to the calendar before anyone else does. I mark out times for prayer, for reading, for leisure, for the silence and solitude out of which creative work – prayer, preaching, and listening – can issue.

– Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*,
pp.17-23

*While it was still night, way before dawn, he got up
and went out to a secluded spot and prayed.*

– Mark 1:35 (*The Message*)

EXERCISE

Practice slowing. Look for opportunities to disrupt your need to get things done now. Take time to just be more relaxed with a less hurried agenda. Drive to work in the slow lane. If you go to the store, get in the longest line.

“Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well when they cannot be discerned from the top of a mountain.”

–CH Spurgeon

Quenched

It has been said that a good teacher will make the complex seem simple. This is the task of the pastor when he is in teaching mode. Making the Word and ways of God understandable is one of the joys of ministry. CW Slemming describes that process here.

Having reached the mountaintop the sheep are hot and thirsty. It may be that there is water in abundance gushing from a rock, or bounding over rocks and making its way swiftly down the side of a mountain: but this would not meet the need of the sheep, they could perish from thirst while water is abundant because they cannot drink from fast running water. It becomes necessary for the Shepherd to find a hollowed rock or something that will hold water and then he will bail it from the rich running stream into the receptacle or, if it be gushing from a rock with his staff he will scratch a channel in the earth from the water for a little distance and, following the earth the water will trickle along the

channel, fill up the hollow, and so he has made a pool of still waters. From this, and others that he will make, the sheep drink.

Christ's love is like torrential waters. His grace is like a swelling tide. Who can approach the height and depth, length and breadth of the love of God? It passes understanding; it is beyond our comprehension, but from it comes that life-giving stream from which you and I find refreshment. God's Word, too, is like a great torrent. The depths of its mysteries will never be fathomed, the height of its glory never attained, the vastness of its wonders never discovered. It is a mine never to be exhausted, a spring never to run dry. It is the unsearchable riches of his grace but, while it remains beyond all human comprehension, we thank God for the still waters of that word to which we have been led and of which we have partaken, and we shall anticipate the day when we shall be able to eat of the hidden manna and drink of the fountainhead.

– CW Slemming, *Echoes from the Hills of Bethlehem*, pp.39-40

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.

–Psalm 23:1-2 (*The Message*)

EXERCISE

This week explain the trinity to a child, the virtue of humility to a proud soul or the purpose of the cross to one who thinks they already know.



*“The scarcest article today is plain faithfulness.
‘Good and faithful servants’ are at a premium.”*

– Vance Havner

No Straight Lines on Earth

I searched one day but could not find any straight lines on earth. Among the animals, the trees, the flowers, the multitudes of fish, and birds, even people, I searched in vain for anything that was purely aligned.

I found plenty of things that were pretty straight. Mighty redwoods, the edge of a bird's wing, mountain ridges, even flower stems and blades of grass. But none of them were completely straight. None of them qualified in my eyes.

I wondered and then realized that this is as it should be. God alone is completely straight. His creation, especially considering the Fall, is filled with anomalies and imperfections. We have knots in trees, bumpy noses, jagged seashores. Our ways are crooked, His way is straight. But there was more.

Sitting on the rocks of a jetty on my native Long Island's south shore one day I discovered not one, but two straight lines in the seascape before me.

They remain the only two straight lines I have ever noticed in the natural realm, though neither is actually located on terra firma itself.

First I saw that the spot where the water met the sky was perfectly straight. The horizon, the unreachable, fabled place always in the distance, always just out of reach, was perfectly straight. I think God and His preferred future for us are there.

Then just a few moments later, as I was still taking in this truth of the horizon, I saw another straight line. In fact, I saw lots of them. Through the clouds, dozens of sunbeams came cascading down from heaven in perfectly straight lines that were miles long. There was no effort, they were just there. Our heavenly Father remains the only source of straightness in a crooked world. The beams did not start at the earth's crust and fly upward, but came downward to us from Him.

In ministry, we sometimes think it is our job to straighten out what is crooked. Clearly this is an impossible task, and I don't think God ever called us to that. How many a minister has collapsed in exhaustion trying to weed out every trace of sin and corruption in the flock or in society?

Moses himself ministered to a mixed group of people. There were many sincere followers of God in the group to be sure, but there were also some real laggards. Imagine if Moses had spent his time trying to straighten them all out!

Our task is no different. For the sake of our sanity a balance must be struck between the discipline we bring as God's undershepherds and allowing the Lord to bring His own discipline. They are His sheep, not ours.

– Richard Earl

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat?"

– Numbers 11:4 (NKJV)

EXERCISE

Take a piece of paper and write down the names of three EGRs in your sphere of influence (Extra Grace Required). Ask the Lord to show you how you can minister life to them. Be willing to offer encouragement, empathy, instruction, exhortation, admonition or even rebuke.

Among Stupid Souls

What are we to do when we come across stupid souls? Ignorant souls we can deal with, they need knowledge; the stupid soul does not need knowledge; the stupid soul needs to have the word of God until he is worried by it. The difficulty is how the worker is to get the word of God into its right place. Jesus Christ says the stupid soul is the one that “hears the word but does not understand it.” “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart...” (Matthew 13:19).

Does God hold a man culpable for being stupid spiritually? He certainly does. Every case of stupidity recorded in the Bible is punished by God. How can I get the word of God into a stupid soul?

Read 1 Samuel 15, and see how Samuel dealt with Saul. It’s the commandment of God, “why did you not obey that?” Take the apostle Paul, the very

same thing: “Oh foolish Galatians who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?” And our Lord’s own words: “Oh foolish man, and slow of heart to believe after all that the prophets have spoken!”

This is the time, Christian worker when you must use the word until you get it wedged in somehow in that stupid soul, until it rankles and worries its way to the soul’s salvation or destruction, and there was never a class that will drive a worker closer to God than the stupid soul, they will tax every bit of patience and endurance you have. They always pretend to want to do something – “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” – why? They would not obey the word they heard, that is the beginning.

You remember Samuel asked Saul if he had fulfilled the word of God with regard to the Amalekites, and Saul said he had: “Blessed be thou the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” And Samuel said, “What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” It’s pretending that is the first characteristic of the stupid soul.

When God gives you a word for a soul who is stupid, keep at it. This is the time when you have to keep using the verse God gives you for a soul: every time you meet him, every time you write to him, every time you talk to him. The only way you will stir up that one out of his stupidity is by driving

home the word of God, and presently you will see that stupid soul saved from perdition, if it has not gone as far away from God as Saul, and as far away as many a stupid soul will go for lack of faithful workers.

When the Word of God has begun its piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, it will have its wonder-working way and heal and re-create and dissipate the stupidity.

– Oswald Chambers, *Workmen of God*, pp. 71-79

Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”

– *Matthew 17:17 (NKJV)*

EXERCISE

Practice coaching and active listening. It is sometimes hard for pastors to listen as much as we should. We are always called upon for advice and many people would rather be told what to do than to figure it out for themselves.

