

From The Editor

# Enduring...At Least On Mondays

by Art Azurdia



It was a gray, grungy, gloomy *Monday*.

Though not exceptional, the morning and evening services from the previous Lord's Day had been fine . . . at least they had been free of conflict and complaint, for which I was thankful. Nevertheless, I was extraordinarily tired. The pace over the prior three weeks had been relentless: the ongoing routines and responsibilities of pastoral and family life, speaking at two out-of-town conferences, and the completion of a journal article that was already past due.

I was scheduled to meet a friend for lunch on this *Monday*, the pastor of a church in a nearby town. Several weeks earlier I had scheduled this appointment—with no small measure of enthusiasm, I might add. After all, my friend is an engaging personality, an experienced preacher, and a man of integrity who has served the same congregation for thirty years. "There's a lot to glean from a man like this," I reasoned to myself. And yet, on this *Monday*, everything inside me wanted to cancel—and I would have, if doing so at such short notice would not have been regarded as disrespectful or rude.

We met at the restaurant, ordered our food, and began to chat. We talked about various kinds of things germane to pastors: our love/hate relationship with preaching, the books we were reading, the new building program in which he was engaged. Then, with what seemed to be very little effort at transition, he changed the subject:

"You look tired."

Admittedly, I was taken aback at how direct he was. Though we had been acquaintances for a few years, our relationship had been exclusively professional, albeit warm and friendly. His blunt observation, however, now seemed to push beyond the unspoken boundaries that heretofore had defined our conversations. Frankly, it felt a bit invasive . . . inappropriately *personal*. Yet, this man twenty years my senior seemed genuine in his concern. "I'll stick my toe in the water," I figured, "and see what happens."

"Yeah, I'm really spent. I'm exhausted and a bit depressed. I think I could really use some time off."

He listened without the slightest expression of contempt or ridicule. And as I talked, it became apparent to me—he *knew*. He *understood*. He *identified*. So I stepped a bit more deeply into the water:

"Do you ever feel like moving on? I don't mean leaving the ministry, of course. But do you ever think about finding a different church to pastor? How have you endured at the same place for thirty years?"

I'll never forget what my friend said to me that *Monday*. He didn't cite any verses. Nor did he assault my intelligence with bumper-sticker superficialities wrapped in pious colloquialisms. It wasn't theological information I needed. His experience had taught him I needed refreshment—the kind of refreshment that can only come from being able to laugh at ourselves. This is how he answered me:

“Why haven’t I ever left this church? Well, years ago my daddy said to me: ‘Son, never make a pastoral change when you’re tired or depressed.’ So, it’s been thirty years, and I’ve never made a pastoral change!”

Perhaps we should have been embarrassed for ourselves, given how heartily we laughed through the remainder of our lunch. He never did connect the dots for me. But it was something I didn’t need him to do. I *knew*. I *understood*. I *identified*. He was telling me, this pastor-friend of mine, that for the last thirty years he had been, *in a manner of speaking*, tired and depressed. And, *in a manner of speaking*, I too have never known ministry in any other way.

Please don’t get me wrong. I love the ministry. My life is the ministry. I believe that, on the great and final day, the Lord of the Church will reward my family for the sacrifices they endured that I might wholeheartedly give myself to the ministry. I believe the pastoral ministry is the greatest work to which a man may be called. But I also believe the pastoral ministry is the most demanding and ferocious work to which a man may be called. As such, the occupational hazard of ministry is the consistent experience of being tired and depressed . . . at least on *Mondays*. Knowing this—and *expecting this*—is indispensable to enduring in ministry.

It’s the theme we’ve taken up in this issue of *The Spurgeon Fellowship Journal*. Why? Because the statistics are staggering and disturbing. Men are leaving pastoral ministry in unprecedented numbers, never again to return. The average pastoral tenure at a local church is now at an all-time low. So how do we endure in ministry? It’s a question of strategic importance—a question vitally essential to the prayerful pursuit of reformation and revival in our time.

This issue of *TSFJ*, of course, makes no claim to answer this question comprehensively. Its articles, sermons, historical reflection, quotes, and reviews do, however, seek to stimulate your consideration of this critical matter. It is my heartfelt prayer they will contribute to your faithful endurance in the great endeavor we know as pastoral ministry.

May you, dear brothers, “endure everything for the sake of the elect” (2 Ti 2:10), knowing that this side of the new heavens and the new earth there will always be—at the very least—*Mondays*.