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My Top 10 Resources on Pastoral Care

A seasoned shepherd selects those most helpful for 'the cure of souls.'

Lee Eclov | posted April 28, 2016



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Editor's Note: "Doctors enter the practice of medicine. Lawyers, the practice of law. Pastors enter the practice of grace. Grace is our stock-in-trade." These words come from Lee Eclov, a pastor of 35 years who currently leads the Village Church of Lincolnshire north of Chicago. Eclov sees grace not only the content of the pastor's message; it's integral to the way we're called to shepherd God's people. Over the years, Eclov has contributed dozens of articles to *Preaching Today* and *Leadership Journal*.

He specializes in gently directing fellow pastors past models and metrics and towards what he calls the "slow, small, but immeasurably sacred work of pastoral care." When we thought of whom to tap to give the best resources on the topic, he immediately came to mind. We're glad he said yes.

- 1. Models and mentors.** There are fine blogs and websites on pastoral care, but pastoral care is not best taught from resources and classes. Find a good shepherd who can help you learn how to pray with your people, how to counsel well, and how to make a hospital call or home visit. Someone who will talk to you about caring for the one sheep instead of the herd.
- 2. Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*.** The angles Peterson speaks of are the pastoral basics: prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction. This book is a counterbalance to the incessant emphasis on ministry metrics. I felt as though Peterson grabbed me by the chin, like my mother used to do to get me to look her in the eye. Then he says, "Seriously, just these three things: prayer, scripture, and spiritual direction!"
- 3. Timothy Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks*.** Dr. Laniak, an Old Testament scholar at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, invested a lot of time among the shepherds of the Middle East. He brings his knowledge of the Scriptures, his pastoral sensibilities, and these up-close-and-personal experiences with shepherds whose work has changed little in 2,000 years. This book helped me remember that leadership and guarding the flock against spiritual predators are as much a part of shepherding as tender, loving care of

individuals. It is a kind of pastor's devotional. (Laniak's more theological treatment of the same subject is [*Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible.*](#))

4. **Eugene Peterson**, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*. You probably wouldn't think to look for pastoral training in these five biblical books: Song of Songs – “The Pastoral Work of Prayer-Directing,” Ruth – “of Story-Making,” Lamentations – “of Pain-Sharing,” Ecclesiastes – “of Nay-Saying,” and Esther – “of Community-Building.” From Esther, for example, he observes, “A realization that there is, in fact, an *enemy* forces a reassessment of priorities.”
5. **Gordon MacDonald's columns in *Leadership Journal***. I have been helped by MacDonald's books, like *Ordering Your Private World* (which a friend ordered me to read years ago.) But his [quarterly articles in *Leadership*](#) always spoke wisely to the pastor's work and thought.
6. **Eugene Peterson**, *The Pastor: A Memoir*. Yes, Peterson again. I highlighted so many sections in my Kindle version that when I printed them out it was almost a book unto itself. Here was a chance to get inside the mind of this extraordinary pastor. I doubt any of us can get away with some of the things he did, like stop attending elder board meetings, but oh, how much we've come to admire a man so singly devoted to being a shepherd of God's flock!
7. **History's great revivals**. At the beginning of my pastoral career I attended a conference about revival. We studied Israel's revivals portrayed so vividly in 2 Chronicles, and I first heard the stories of the great revivals in history—like America's Great Awakenings, the Welsh Revival and the Asbury Revival. The centrality of prayer changed my pastoral work. Drawing God's people to corporate prayer became a mark of my ministry. If you want one good book, I heartily recommend Collin Hansen and John D. Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir*.
8. **Gordon T. Smith**, *Spiritual Direction*. Learning about spiritual direction later in my career has changed the way I pastor. This 96-page book introduces us to why we need spiritual direction personally and how we do it with others. Behind this quest is the ancient pastoral concern for the care and cure of souls.
9. **Larry Crabb**, *Connecting*. When I read this book almost 20 years ago I gained confidence that by simply listening carefully to the Holy Spirit while engaged in relationships with God's people I could speak significantly into souls. Crabb warned me off less useful approaches to helping people. His book aims to help small groups connect deeply with one another, but I found it helpful in one-on-one pastoral care.
10. **Lee Eclov**, *Pastoral Graces: Reflections on the Care of Souls*. Moody Press asked me to capture my love of pastoring and the grace pastors can bring to our everyday shepherding work. Pastors seem to resonate with these stories and insights into our grace-filled care of souls.

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