

PULPIT LIFE

Avoiding the Ministry Drain



Leading your
church in
the new and
living way



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Being a pastor of a Christian church can be one of the hardest jobs on the planet. You're supposed to be superhuman while the congregation meanders through life as mere mortals. As expectations mount, the pressure gets greater while the enemy looks for holes in your spiritual armor. You feel like you can't afford to make a mistake. Every little thing you do gets scrutinized by those who continually criticize without offering to step in and help. Oh, and your family forgets what you look like because you are seldom home. Can you relate?

Pulpit life does not have to resemble a vacuum cleaner, sucking every last bit of energy and joy out of your life. There is a better way — the new and living way.

1.) Let Go!

God does not need you to accomplish His will. Stop and let that truth drill down into your inner being. You are not the only one capable of watching over the ministry, yet many pastors feel like they have to baby sit every detail. This lie holds many church leaders captive to a life of worry, harsh judgment, brutal schedules and unfulfilled expectations. Part of discipling the flock is putting them in positions where they may fail. Your job as a pastor is to help them learn from their mistakes, grow in their passion for Jesus and increasingly do more of the kingdom work.

Be aware your controlling nature may hamper the growth of those in your church fellowship. People may be more cautious about serving and less apt to take risks. They may resent your constant interference and distrust your motives.

If you struggle with trusting others, a controlling spirit may plague you. Confess your sin to God, ask for Him to flood you with His peace and forgive those who may have disappointed you in the past.

2.) Get Away

Many pastors spend so much time handling the 'necessary' business of the church that they have little time for anything else. But a minister will only be as successful as his/her private walk with God. Empty vessels offer no living water.

One key characteristic of mighty men of God is that they all spent time alone with the Lord. Look at Paul who spent time in the wilderness seeking the face of God before starting his ministry. Consider the lives of Moses, David, or Elijah; all of these men set aside time to pursue God one-on-one. Even Jesus, as both God and man, set the example

for us by spending forty days and nights alone with His Father in the wilderness. Jesus frequently went away to pray and commune with the Father. When was the last time you took a day, weekend or even week just to spend with God? Are you giving God the crumbs of your life?

Even time spent doing ‘ministry’ can get in the way of one’s real purpose for being on the earth — to experience a deep relationship with Jesus Christ. Turn off the cell phone, get the elders to oversee the church business, make arrangements for your family, and head out to a secluded place to seek Jesus. Be honest and be willing to deal with the hard realities of your ministry life. While listening to the Holy Spirit, you may even discover that you have missed your true calling. Maybe you were never called to be a full-time pastor. Ministry begins with a call from God not ordination by men. You may discover that you are in the right place, but you have not gone about it the right way. If you listen to the voice of God and obey, the Lord will bless you and His ministry through you. Dare to listen and seek the Word for the new and living way. Remember, effective ministry starts with prayer.

3.) No Lone Ranger Pastors: Find Accountability

The epistles (written to the Church not the unbelievers) warn about the temptations in the last days and those that fall away from true faith in Christ. This includes pastors. Hebrews cautions Christians about forsaking the assembly of believers as the day of judgement draws near. The purpose of gathering together is to encourage and exhort one another in the truth and to pursue holiness. James encourages believers to confess their faults to each other. Due to spiritual pride, this can be difficult for many Christian leaders.

Given the somewhat sensitive position held by some pastors, many do not seek true accountability. They do not have anybody other than their spouse they can be real with. And if they have a problem with their spouse, they do not feel like they can go for help because ‘pastors are not supposed to have problems.’ The denomination may provide a loose spiritual covering. But usually the hierarchy does not act unless an emergency arises.

Being a lone ranger pastor (someone without true accountability) is a dangerous situation. Ultimately, every believer is accountable only to God. Yet we all go through times where we need others to point the way back to Christ. Many godly men and women with the best intentions have fallen and lost their anointing or place of ministry because of a lack of accountability. There is no shame in needing others. All

flesh, including Jesus' flesh, desires to act in ways opposed to the will of God. You are not alone. Find another pastor or leader, someone you can trust and begin meeting with them every other week. Share your lives and see how the experience will produce lasting fruit in your life, relationships and ministry.

4.) Out of Alignment

Much like a car with a tendency to pull to one side or the other, many pastors and churches are out of alignment. This occurs when kids control the parents using manipulation and lies, wives with a Jezebel attitude bull over their husbands or men fail to keep the proper priorities.

When a family or church is out of alignment, strife and/or pain always exists. Being in alignment brings peace, joy and godly relationships. The proper order is Christ as the head of man, man the head of the wife and the children falling under the authority of the parents. The Word gives the responsibility to the man of the house to lead his family in righteousness and service to God. Parents are called to disciple their children. Men are called to love their wives and wash them with the pure water of the Word. But too many have pushed this responsibility onto the local church. All believers are called to be priests not just those with the title 'pastor.'

It can be real easy to convince yourself that you are doing God's work when you put ministry before your family. You may even be doing this now. The congregation always has plenty of needs and reasons to meet with you. They turn to you filling your time. Your wife and kids will understand.....right? The Word clearly outlines the proper priority — Jesus, the family and then ministry.

If you are out of alignment, expect to end up in the ditch. Your ministry will suffer and your family may fall apart as you try to hold everything together on your own. By putting God first, He enables you to be a loving husband and father while meeting your ministry obligations. Ultimately, your greatest ministry calling is to minister to God through prayer, reading the Word and worship. Be like King David who desired one thing above all else to dwell in the presence of God all his life and to gaze upon His beauty. Success as a minister comes as you prepare yourself to be the Bride of Christ.

5.) Kill the Sacred Cows

Traditions can be great things, yet they can also be bearers of death. Sacred cows are things in the church that exist for no good reason other

than tradition. These activities or programs consume a ton of resources while offering little of kingdom value to the Church. Sacred cows require pastors to run around doing a number of things that really do not need to be done. Pastors want to meet the expectations of the church members. Afraid to challenge the customary practices, the pastor just accepts the sacred cows as part of the job. This even happens to a senior pastor who has been leading a church for a long time. Maybe the idea for the sacred cow originally came from you.

How do you determine what is a sacred cow? Start by praying, ask God to show you activities or things that could be cut back or eliminated. Listen for the voice of God and begin to evaluate everything. Don't hold back anything. Maybe the choir needs to go. Maybe the building projects should be delayed. God could even be calling you to overhaul or eliminate the Sunday morning service.

Do you have to push people to participate in a particular ministry? Does it have a champion other than a pastor? If the people are not willing to support something, maybe it doesn't really need to exist. The absence of something tends to challenge people to step up and take personal responsibility if they want the ministry or program restored. People assume everything is OK until the music stops. Don't be afraid to seek God and let Him challenge everything in your local church.

6.) Equip More, Do Less

Most people in church attend on Sunday mornings and do little else to help out other than throw some money in the offering plate a couple of times per month. The pastor's job is not to do everything for the people. The pastor is called to disciple his flock (train and prepare them to minister). They are supposed to carry forth the mission into their families, schools, neighborhoods and workplaces.

If you have to do too many things in your church, you are likely not equipping and releasing others in ministry the way you should. Take the time to train and encourage the people. The results will be better for both them and you in the long run.

7.) Walk By Faith

Ask yourself this hard question, ‘When was the last time you had to do something completely on faith?’ If you’re like most people, you would rather have everything pre-planned or at least have a safety net if things don’t work out. According to the Bible, “It is impossible to please God without faith.” If you live a life without walking in faith,

you are likely doing too much on your own and limiting the move of God. Faith gets out of the way to let God accomplish His perfect will.

God does not call us to a blind faith. A Christian's faith is based on the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul wrote, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith requires action now believing in the things to come. True faith defines reality based on the Word of God not the physical circumstances. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Trust God! You'll be glad you did.

The New & Living Way

When Jesus performed His earthly ministry, He shook the very foundations of the religious establishment. Christ forever changed the rules of the game by tearing down the wall separating God and man. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross ushered in the new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-25).

The Bible described two basic paradigms — the Old Testament priesthood and the New Testament priesthood. The OT priesthood was based on natural birth. The NT priesthood is based on a spiritual birth through Christ's blood. The OT priesthood stresses the priests' role to be the intermediary between God and the people. The NT priesthood changes the focus so man can directly commune with God. Under the new covenant and the new priesthood, God offers a direct relationship without the use of an intermediary. All believers are priests in the family of God, and we individually receive specific direction from God not an earthly priest.

Many modern day churches are still working under the principles of authority established under the OT priesthood. Pastors and teachers are elevated into a position where God alone should be. Many times the people do this without any encouragement from those in leadership. People, including many Christians, so much desire earthly kings and leaders that they will elevate any man who seems worthy. Fleshy Christians are not content with a God they cannot see.

Sometimes church leaders foster the OT priesthood because they want to be in control. Yet, the OT priesthood leaves people locked in chains. Most people in these types of churches never grow because their faith has no roots of its own. They only receive a minimal amount of food each week. The pastors and a small group of people end up doing everything in the church. Leaders get burnt out in a hurry. This is the fruit of the old and dead way — the wrong way to run a New Testament church fellowship.

The difference between the two priesthoods causes one to stop and ask, ‘What is real ministry?’ While every believer might come up with a slightly different definition, here is what the Spirit showed me:

What is ministry?

Definition: Ministry is anything done out of a call from God to fulfill the will of God to the glory of God and His Kingdom.

Authentic ministry starts with a call from God (Isaiah 6:8-9, Matthew 28:18-20). From Moses to Isaiah to Paul, the Bible shows a pattern of God calling and equipping His people for service. The call can be either individual or corporate. This call guides the minister when distractions arise. The work of the ministry must be done in the name and power of God (Colossians 3:17, John 15:4-5). Only the power of God can bring lasting change to the human heart (Philippians 2:13, II Timothy 3:5). Anything else will lead to dead works. Real ministry must be done to the glory of God and His kingdom (I Corinthians 10:31, I Peter 4:11). Ultimately, the focus of ministry is God not men. In this consumer-driven culture, it can be real easy to lose sight of this truth. Christ-centered ministry will accomplish the will and purpose of God (Hebrews 10:36; I Peter 4:2). From Genesis to Revelation, God has established a plan to bring glory to His name by restoring men unto Himself. The OT priesthood gets in the way by creating artificial barriers. Christ died to free men from the bonds of sin and death.

The enemy wins when people are constrained in the OT priesthood. The law cannot save. Salvation exists through Christ alone. Many have stayed weak in their faith because they have not understood the basic truths of the new priesthood.

The Lord will hold the leaders accountable. Those who encourage dependence on men and devotion to rules without a relationship are bringing wrath upon themselves.

In too many local churches, the leadership tries to scheme, plan and control everything. Not only is God put in a box; the church members are imprisoned by the focus being put on anything other than God. Instead of letting the Lord lead through the Spirit of Truth, men rely on their own wisdom and plans.

The world needs more Spirit-led churches where the members organically live out their faith daily through a deep walk with Christ. Who has the controls in your church? Is it the Lord or men?

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