

Cost of Pastoring

Most of us at the commencement of pastoring have grandiose expectations of all that we will accomplish. This is a mixture of faith and ignorance. Although churches around us may crumble somehow the possibility of this happening to us seems unrealistic. However sooner or later crunch time comes to all of us. It is not 'if we get hurt, but when we get hurt' that determines whether we have a realistic view of pastoring.

On the other hand there is nothing quite so satisfying as in leading people in their walk with God and in having an impact for God on the world around us. However the price is high and the toll great and not all are willing to pay the price.

Heart-ache and turmoil come because of the conflict of spiritual powers (often expressed through people), but God uses these forces to purify our hearts whether we can see it or not.

'Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding.' Psalm 148:7-8.

The conflicts and pain we experience have been allowed by God and will prove helpful if they cause us to walk humbly before Him.

'I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.' John 12:24.

The important thing is not that we prove to ourselves or others that we have it all together (as we have not), but the important calling on our lives is to walk humbly before God and to tremble at His word (Isaiah 66:2b). The greatest success in ministry is to fulfil that calling, whether or not there is obvious fruit.

The pastors I really admire, are not the super stars, but those pastors who hang on in some extremely difficult church year after year, without seeing any fruit for their labour. On the other hand there will come a time in most cases, when it is right to leave and start afresh elsewhere. Wait for God's timing though before you act.

The following are the major areas where we can struggle in the pastorate:

Loneliness

Most people will experience seasons of acute loneliness in ministry. Elijah was so desperate on one occasion that he wanted God to take his life from him (1 Kings 19:4), but remember this was after a time of highly effective and stressful ministry. Pastors are sometimes unintentionally put onto a different plane to other people. Therefore people may avoid inviting them to special social activities or even home for a meal.

Very often a pastor carries confidential information about others close to his heart. At times it could make situations easier to deal with if this information was divulged, especially when these people are talked about, but confidentiality does not permit this.

Sometimes when experiencing great blessing, especially when ministering away from the home church, a pastor is keen to share with enthusiasm all that God did when he arrives home. However, human nature being what it is, others are not always interested. The home front is what is important to them.

Criticism

We must accept that occasionally criticism does have a grain of truth in it that we need to take the opportunity to learn from. It is the way it sometimes comes to us which is the problem. Another time, someone comes 'on the quiet' and mentions that half the church are concerned about something that is happening, but this is a reflection of their own hearts. Naturally names are never mentioned, which makes the issue harder to deal with. After some time you will learn who is in your church to help you learn and who is there to pull you down.

The most hurtful criticism comes when you are sure God has led you to say or do something, and those closest to you disagree. Even the disciples opposed Jesus' journey to the Cross. But we are not Jesus and perhaps what we think is not right.

Fatigue

Emotional, spiritual and mental fatigue is very draining. It especially comes after a great blessing or when a problem continues to haunt you that will not go away. As someone has said, 'it is not climbing the mountain which is difficult but continually walking with sand in your shoes'. I do not think we will ever be permanently without the sand. Plan times for refreshment.

Rejection

We need to be fully secure in ourselves to master this knock. It may come from the world, but it hits the hardest when it comes from those we love and trust. Rejection that really hurts will always be from the Christians around us.

'They (the priests) are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean'.
Ezekiel 44:23. (word inserted).

People not wanting to walk in holiness will always reject those who do.

Success

After months and years of turmoil outward success is most rewarding and even exhilarating. From a human point of view this success is measured by growing churches and extensive travel both at home and abroad. Not all people in Scripture coped well with success. "Gold, Girls and Glory" are still effective tools that Satan uses to tempt, divert and destroy. Watch out, for the "higher you go the harder you fall."

There are other factors which cause discouragement and hurt. Seasons do pass and a brighter day will dawn. It was the *joy* before Jesus which enabled Him to endure the cross. May you too experience that joy as you view ministry with a long-term perspective.