

Cost of Pastoring

Most of us begin pastoring with great expectations of what we will accomplish, a blend of faith and inexperience. Though we may see other churches struggle or even crumble, it can seem unlikely that the same could happen to us. Yet sooner or later, every pastor faces a moment of crisis. It is not whether we will be hurt, but when, that reveals whether we have a realistic view of ministry.

On the other hand, few things are as fulfilling as guiding people in their walk with God and helping shape the world around us for His purposes. Yet the cost is often high, the toll significant, and not everyone is willing to pay it.

Heartache and turmoil often arise from conflicts among spiritual powers, frequently expressed through people. Yet God uses even these forces to purify our hearts, whether we recognise it or not. The conflicts and pain we experience have been allowed by God and will prove helpful if they cause us to walk humbly before Him. Let that not discourage you for the power of the Holy Spirit is there to comfort and fight for you.

'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 seed' John 12:24.

Our calling is not to prove to ourselves and others that we are great, as we not, but our calling is *'to walk humbly before God and tremble at His word'* (Isaiah 66:2b). True success in ministry is fulfilling that calling, whether visible fruit is apparent or not. The pastors I really admire, are not the super stars, but those pastors who are committed to the Lord in some difficult situation year after year, without seeing any fruit for their labour.

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

Loneliness

Most people will experience seasons of 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, some 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.

When a pastor experiences great blessing, especially while ministering away from the home church, he may return eager to share all God has done. Yet others are not always as interested, since their main concern is often what has been happening at home.

Criticism

We must recognise that criticism sometimes contains a grain of truth and offers an opportunity to learn. The difficulty is often in how it is delivered. At times, someone may speak 'quietly' and claim that half the church is concerned about an issue, while revealing more about their own heart than the congregation's. Since names are usually withheld, the matter becomes harder to address. Over time, you will discern who is there to help you grow and who is simply trying 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 after all.

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

'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.

Conclusion

Apart from receiving encouragement from those who believe in me, my most significant way I persevere through a life time of ministry is through reading, memorising and claiming the promises of God in Scripture. Jesus demonstrated the importance of memorising Scripture and we see this in His seasons of severe trials such as Matthew 4:1-11.

'Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.'

Psalm 126:5,6