

The Most Frequent Burdens Pastors Face

By Chuck Lawless

In my years of church consulting, I have spent hours talking to local church pastors. Much of the conversation revolves around church structure, vision, etc., but seldom does the conversation stay at that level. Pastors, it seems, long for someone to listen to them. They want someone to share their burdens, even if only for a few minutes.

Listen to the topics of pain I often hear, and take a minute to pray for your church leaders.

1. **Declining church growth** – No pastor I know wants his congregation to be plateaued or in decline; however, the majority of churches in North America are in that state. A pastor may put a hopeful veneer on that truth publicly, but I've wept with pastors who grieve privately over their church's decline.
2. **Losing the support of friends** – Losing the backing of a Christian brother or sister is a unique pain. God-centered relationships are a miraculous gift, the melding of hearts at a level the world cannot understand. When those bonds are severed, particularly over matters that are seldom eternally significant, the anguish is deep.
3. **Grieving a fall** – Pastoral love is not a guarantee against failure. In fact, even Jesus had close followers who fell into sin and rebellion. When our pastoral calls for repentance go unheeded, it's difficult not to take that rejection personally.
4. **Sensing that the sermon went nowhere** – For many of us, our ministry is centered around the Sunday sermon. Ideally, hours of preparation end in focused exposition that leads to life transformation—but that result doesn't always happen. Few pastors have a safe place to express candid concerns about their own preaching.
5. **Losing vision** – A pastor who has lost his vision for the church is leading on fumes. To admit that condition, though, is risky. *Not* to admit that reality is even more dangerous. Little will change until that pastor can honestly share his lack of focus.
6. **Being lonely** – Pastors bear others' burdens, but they do so confidentially. They share both the struggles and the joys of life, from birth to death. Sometimes, previous pain has made it difficult for them to open up to others. Consequently, they carry the weight of many on the shoulders of one.
7. **Dealing with unsupportive staff** – Facing contrary members weekly is hard enough, but facing unsupportive staff every day is an ongoing angst. Correction is difficult, and firing can be

- agonizing. Some pastors simply hope for change while not knowing the best next steps to take.
8. **Remembering failures** – Not many of us easily forget that disorganized sermon, that rotten counseling advice, that disruptive team meeting, or that hasty staff hire. Perhaps we can laugh at some of yesterday's failures, but others still haunt us because we never want to fail God or His people.
 9. **Dealing with death recurrently** – Few responsibilities are as serious as officiating at a funeral. Even when burying a believer, pastors, too, grieve the loss of friends. Burying someone who was apparently not a believer is even more gut wrenching. Ministry amid such pain without becoming calloused is difficult indeed.
 10. **Facing personal jealousies** – I wish no pastor dealt with personal or professional jealousies, but I know better – both because of my own sinfulness and my pastoral conversations. Coming to grips with the rawness of our depravity is never easy.
 11. **Balancing family and ministry priorities** – No pastor sets out to lose his family. Few leap into the inattentiveness that often precedes adultery; instead, they almost imperceptibly slide into sin. One reason for that failure is their lack of mentors and colleagues who help them prioritize family while fulfilling ministry responsibilities.
 12. **Responding to criticism** – Continual criticism is wearying. Learning how to hear any sliver of truth in criticism while not growing angry is challenging. We can indeed be better ministers through healthy criticism, but few of us learn that truth in the midst of controversy.

I love pastors. I have been a pastor. I would return to the pastorate with excitement if the Lord so called me. Accordingly, I challenge us to pray for pastors today.

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