

5 Fears That Frequently Attack Pastors

If you are human, you have secret fears. I don't mean ones like fear of snakes or fear of heights, but deeper ones.

You may have never verbalized them to anyone. Perhaps they have burrowed themselves deep into your subconscious. Perhaps they've become like a shadow that dogs your every step. Perhaps they're no big deal.

However you'd classify yours, I believe we all carry them. And pastors deal with them as well. Although I've not based my list below on science or surveys, I believe they capture several fears pastors often face.

Here are five of a pastor's greatest fears (not in any special order):

1. What if my ministry is insignificant? In writing my second book (*Five Ministry Killers and How to Defeat Them*, IVP, 2010), I included a quote by David Goetz that captures this fear well.

I often sat in the studies of both small-church pastors and megachurch pastors, listening to their stories, their hopes, their plans for significance. I deduced, albeit unscientifically, that often clergymen in midlife had worse crises of limits than did other professionals. Religious professionals went into the ministry for the significance, to make an impact, called by God to make a difference with their lives. But when you're 53 and serving a congregation of 250, you know, finally, you'll never achieve the large-church immortality symbol, the glory that was promised to you. That can be a dark moment—or a dark couple of years.

2. What if I really mess up? One of the rising stars in the

Baptist world in the 1980s and 1990s in the U.S., Joel Gregory, rose to what was then the pinnacle of the Baptist world to pastor First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, and succeed W.A. Criswell. However, two years later, he resigned, his marriage failed and he sold cemetery plots to make a living. His remarkable journey (nicely chronicled here), however, led him to a place of redemption and he is now a respected preaching professor at Baylor.

3. What if people leave my church because they are upset? I know of no pastor who has ever led a church where 100 percent of the people stayed. Some leave for good reasons. Some don't. And often the pastor is the last one to hear they left. When that happens, it hurts, notwithstanding the good feelings that come from "blessed subtractions."

4. What if I can't make the people happy? In my third book (*People Pleasing Pastors: Avoiding the Pitfalls of Approval Motivated Leadership*), I surveyed over 2,000 pastors and discovered that from 79-91 percent of pastors self-admitted that people pleasing affected their ministry to some extent. This common temptation is even wired into our brains. Social rejection lights up the same regions of the brain that physical pain does, so when we know someone is not pleased with our performance, it actually hurts.

5. What if the people really knew my deepest struggles? Acceptable struggles like overwork or eating too much usually don't affect the church people see you. But what about pastors who struggle with secret jealousies of more successful pastors, lust or feeling that they often 'fake it' on Sundays. If the people knew their deepest struggles, what would they think? What would their boards think? What would those who hold them in high regard think?

The Bible says we are broken people. That's what makes grace so good. God extends his unmerited love and mercy to us to restore, remake and remold us. Salvation freed us from the

penalty of sin. His Spirit is freeing us from the power of sin. Yet, it won't be until heaven until we are freed from the very presence of sins, including our deepest fears.

Perhaps we should admit our deepest fears to the Lord and to a close, safe friend who can help us face them and conquer them with the Spirit's power. In this post, you can learn what to look for in a safe friend.

What would you add to this list?

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