

When Your Pastor Sins

My first pastor, "Frank,"* who was like a big brother and father to me, is in prison. I don't want to say why he is in prison, but the reason shocked me. When I found out he was in prison, my first response to was to cut off every connection to him and banish him from my life.

Then a close friend of mine convicted me. My friend Bob* deposits money into his prison account every month so he can purchase stuff he needs. Bob told me that he deposits money into his prison account because Frank was the only leader in his life at that time that cared about him as a person.*

"He was the only one who asked me if I had a 401K set up," he says. "He was concerned that I was in the full-time ministry and not taking care of my future." This same pastor called some of his friends when I couldn't pay for my tuition that semester.

Pastor Frank also helped me when I was writing one of the biggest speeches in my life. He gave me advice that I follow to this day, which is: "Speak from the heart." He gave me my first "job" in the church and trusted me to become the leader I didn't believe I could ever become. He invested in me, and I banished him from my life because he sinned.

Looking back on that episode when the news broke, I remember wondering why there wasn't any way he could get help for this problem. I don't know what efforts Frank took to seek help, but knowing the church in general, there isn't a lot of help he could have received.

Pastor Frank's sin caused some people to doubt the validity of the church and their faith in God. I've continued to follow God but realized after reading Danny Silk's *Keep Your Love On* how I judged him and kicked a servant of God out of my life. Even though Pastor Frank is in prison, he is still a

child of God whether I like it or not.

Danny Silk talks about ***“the sin problem”*** in the book. I’ve never heard anyone explain what has disturbed me over the 30-plus years I’ve been a member of various churches. I’ve done what he says:

“If you happen to burst this bubble of delusion by making a mess, then you are punished—usually by people turning their love off and disconnecting from you. Or your home group leader or pastor or some random church lady will tell you to knock it off and get your act together so the image of ‘spotless’ can be maintained for the public. You quickly learn that if you want to preserve ‘relationship’ in the church, then you cannot show people the truth of who you are. You must submit to control by hiding, performing and agreeing.”

“Church leaders have to pretend that they don’t ever sin. If you ever expect to move up the ladder of church leadership, then you have to become pretty fabulous at keeping secrets. ‘This next level here, this is where we put you in charge of stuff. Now, this one right here is when you have a toilet in your house, but you have to act like you never use it. And people at this level here, well ... they don’t use the toilet. Finally, this level would be senior leadership. That’s when they actually come to your house and remove the toilet.”

“Maintaining the illusion that absolutely no sin exists at the top of the ladder creates ridiculous gap between regular people, who sin, and leaders, who supposedly do not. It turns leaders into liars, because they are not allowed to be real people anymore. This only sets them up for isolation and a fall” (Keep Your Love On, p. 153).

I’ve fallen into the pattern of hiding, performing and agreeing. I’ve worked for pastors, and I know the load and expectations they are forced to live up to is inhuman. I’ve

wondered if Pastor Frank had a safe place to admit his struggle if he would have ended up in prison? Or maybe he did find a safe spot to get help but refused it? I don't know the back story of his struggle, but I know regular church folk like me need to let our leaders sin.

Yes, you heard me right. Let your leaders be human and sin.

Your pastor or leader is going to disappoint you and offend you. They are going to freak you out or make you mad. But what we do with the disappointment, offense and being freaked out determines the depth and longevity of your relationship with God.

I'm convinced that God is far more gracious with His servants than I am. Let's look at some of the leaders that He called. King David had a guy killed and married his wife. Samson liked pretty women. Abraham's father, Terah, made idols. When Abraham's wife told him to sleep with her servant, he did not hesitate. God is a Father through the good, the bad and ugly in their lives. Most of the leaders God picked would not be selected by the church search committee for a pastor.

After all, Pastor Frank isn't God. He is a flesh-and-blood man who answered a call to plant a church in a city that he had never been in to reach a group of punk college kids like me who had never stepped in a church. He helped me find my first apartment. He helped me with my first ministry job. I thank God for sending Pastor Frank into my life when I was an unstable, worldly 18-year-old beach bum. He was the first leader who believed in me, and I tossed him out of my life.

After reading Danny Silk's book, I'm going to correct that. If you're a church member, I encourage you not to be offended, disappointed or freaked out when you see your pastor lose their temper or their humanity. Let them be human because you are human. Pray for them and stand with them even if they end up in prison.

**Names changed to protect their privacy.*

Leilani Haywood is the online editor for SpiritLed Woman and contributes to Charisma, Christian Retailing and Ministry Today. She is an award-winning writer and author of Ten Keys to Raising Kids That Love God. Follow her on Twitter or on Facebook.