

Pastors Suffering Loneliness and Burnout at Historic Rates

Recent research has revealed concerning trends among pastors, with an increasing number reporting feelings of loneliness and isolation.

According to a study conducted by the Barna Group, pastors are experiencing a sense of disconnection even within their church communities, despite the support they offer to their congregations.

In 2015, 42% of pastors reported feeling lonely or isolated at times. Fast-forward to last year, and that number surged to 65%, indicating a significant rise in pastoral loneliness. Moreover, the sense of being well-supported by close ones has dwindled over the years. In 2015, 68% of pastors responded positively, but in the latest data, only 49% felt well-supported by those around them.

Barna also found that only about 35% of pastors get monthly spiritual support from a network of their peers or a mentor. This finding echoes the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, which states, "Two are better than one, because there is a good reward for their labor together. For if they fall, then one will help up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no one to help him up."

"These relationships do not flourish by accident," Dr. Glenn Packiam, Barna senior fellow and pastor, said. "They require attention and is too full of the demands of ministry, the chaos of kids' activities, and the many unpredictable events for us to just hope that meaningful connection will just happen."

"Anything worth having is worth pursuing. The chase for deep friendships and intimate relationships is a lifelong quest."

But it can begin today. If we really want to last in ministry, if we want to emerge from this as truly and fully human beings, then we must take seriously the human vocation of loving well.”

Pastors Are Contending with Both Loneliness and Burnout in their Roles

According to Lifeway Research’s 2022 Greatest Needs of Pastors study, 75% of pastors say they are extremely stressed, and 90% report they work between 55-75 hours per week. In the midst of these challenges, pastors can find comfort in the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Pastor Joshua Smith of Light Elk Grove Church in Elk Grove, California, spoke with CBN’s Prayer Link program saying that “it is important for pastors to recharge.”

“We need to be wise with God’s calling on our life, steward it, and make sure it doesn’t crush us,” he explained. “We know God’s burden is light, but we also need to pray for a spirit of wisdom so we can delegate some of those tasks that God has not called us to.”

Pastors must confront the reality of their need for rest, as Smith warns against pouring from an empty cup.

“You and I need to know what grace we walk in so we are not carrying a burden that we are not designed to carry,” he shared. “We also need to be ok with being human and being vulnerable. We need rest. We need to recharge.”

Packiam’s book, “The Resilient Pastor,” delivers a comforting message to church leaders, reminding them they are not alone and can ask for help without hesitation.

“Pastors who are bucking the trend toward burnout tend to portray a strong connection with others around them, a

flourishing connection with God, and a sense of optimism about the future of the Church. They are energized by their jobs, feel well supported by the people in their lives, and generally satisfied with their mental, emotional, and spiritual health,” Packiam says.

“It is possible to last, to be faithful, to be resilient—not by might, not by power, but by the same Holy Spirit who sustained the church throughout the centuries.”

This new research serves as a wake-up call for churches and congregations to rally around their pastors, offering the support, care and understanding they need to continue their vital work with strength, grace and resilience. As the apostle Paul reminded the church in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” {eoa}

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