

11 Ways Pastors Are Abused

With the deluge of news reporting instances of scandals and abuse committed by lead pastors, I thought it necessary to balance this by showing how shepherds (pastors) are also occasionally abused by the sheep (church members). (To be clear, this fact does not justify any scandalous behavior by spiritual leaders.)

Over the past five decades, the overwhelming majority of pastors I have worked with have been sincere Christ followers who have paid an enormous price and suffered much while walking out their sacred calling. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, will target lead pastors since he knows that when the shepherd is struck, the sheep will scatter (Zech. 13:7).

Based upon my own experience as a pastor and the thousands of pastors I have co-labored with while serving movements and networks, the following are 11 ways that sheep abuse their shepherds. (I am not referring to any particular pastor or church but am speaking generically.)

1. Pastors are criticized for taking time off to go on vacation. I will never forget when my wife was criticized for having a tan after coming home from a family vacation. As young pastors, that put us both on edge and made us leery of sharing anything regarding our personal lives. Evidently, some people think pastors are superhuman and never need a break from work and ministry. This, in my opinion, is a form of shepherd abuse.

2. Pastors are often criticized for having nice things. I have heard of pastors being criticized for having a home, a nice car, nice clothes, nice watches, etc. Some people have a religious spirit and expect pastors to take a vow of poverty! Besides, most people don't know the backstory of how and why pastors have nice things. Often things such as clothes,

watches and even cars are given to them by people in the church, or a family member may have given them money for a home. (Every watch I have and all the clothes I wear have been given to me by people who desire to bless me.) True, there are high-profile pastors who receive excessive compensation and/or live lavish lifestyles (although much of their income can be from their book sales or legitimate business deals not related to the church). However, in my opinion, the vast majority of sincere pastors are underpaid. It is a form of abuse to accuse a pastor of misusing church funds because he or she has nice things without knowing the backstory.

3. Pastors face constant violations of private and personal boundaries. I cannot remember how often pastors have told me that their vacation was interrupted and/or personal family time disrupted because somebody had a need and desired prayer, counsel or comfort. When people in a congregation fail to respect the personal family time of their pastor, it is a form of shepherd abuse.

4. Everyone's emergency has to be their emergency. Most pastors eventually learn that when an immature person in their church is hurting, they go into self-preservation mode and expect their emergency to be the pastor's emergency. They expect the pastor to drop everything and come to their aid, irrespective of the circumstances of their pastor's life and family. When this continually happens, it is a form of shepherd abuse.

5. Pastors face gossip and slander regarding leadership decisions. Every pastor has had people in their congregation slander and second-guess decisions without understanding the context or investigating the reason behind their choices. When a church culture develops a critical spirit toward its pastor and leadership, this is a form of shepherd abuse.

6. Pastors experience consistent betrayal. Betrayal is perhaps the most challenging part of a pastor's job. Every pastor I

know has been betrayed by people who they thought were loyal to them but forsook them without notice or explanation. Often, they feel used by people in the congregation who turn on them if they don't get what they want. It can be an overt form of betrayal, like a close associate splitting the church or a friend leaving the church without a legitimate reason. When this happens, it can be a form of shepherd abuse.

7. Pastors are expected to give without receiving anything in return. Most pastors constantly pour their lives and energy out to their churches without anybody pouring life back into them. They preach, teach, pray for people and give godly counsel. Many pastors are burned out, stressed and trying to put out fires. Despite this, most people take them for granted, and very few people take the time to pray for them, bless them and pour life back into them. This is a subtle form of shepherd abuse.

8. They are expected to work insane hours. Many pastors work 12-14 hours every day without an entire day off. Sometimes this is the pastor's fault for not honoring a personal sabbath, but often it is because of the pressure they feel to fulfill the intense demands of the ministry. When a congregation expects their pastor to work 60-80 hours per week, it is shepherd abuse.

9. Many pastors do not receive retirement benefits. Most founding pastors of nondenominational churches have no one on their board that ensures they receive retirement benefits. I have heard of countless pastors who have nothing saved in their later years, which forces them to work way past their prime. When a financially established church doesn't provide for its founding pastor's retirement, it can be a form of shepherd abuse.

10. Many pastors are used for their influence and lack true friends. Many pastors are lonely and lack true friends in their church. (I am not one of them.) Often, they don't know

who to trust and confide in because so many people desire to use them for their influence. When few people are willing to cultivate true friendship with their pastor, it can be a corporate form of objectifying their shepherd. This is abuse.

11. Pastors are expected to be experts in everything as well as theologians. Many pastors are expected to have all the answers related to financial challenges, real estate issues, people challenges and strategy. On top of this, they are expected to be theologians who give in-depth weekly messages. No wonder so many pastors burn out and leave the ministry! When a congregation expects too much of their pastor, it may be a sign of shepherd abuse. {eo}

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