

Healthy Pastors Make Healthy Leaders by Ken Behnken

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2 Timothy 2:15: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

When the Apostle Paul wrote Timothy, he encouraged him to take care of his spiritual life. When the Lord called us into ministry, he called us to be spiritual leaders. The clamor and allure of the world, and our fleshly desire for excitement, satisfaction, and acknowledgement, continually challenge our intent to be a pastor who preaches, walks, and talks the Gospel from the pulpit and in everyday life.

A 1990 statistic from a Southern Baptist executive asserted that for every 20 men who enter the ministry, only one will still be in the ministry by the time they all reach age 65. I think that statistic is a little low for most denominations, yet it speaks the reality that many who commit time, money, and schooling to the office of the ministry will leave their call. Some will leave for health issues, some due to personal problems. Stress will overwhelm others, and some will be forced out by their churches. A number will walk out because of sheer frustration or a sense of failure. I recently read, “If you haven’t given serious thought to leaving the ministry, you haven’t been in it very long.”

When Dr. Don Whitney gave a commencement address at Midwestern Baptist Seminary, he warned these young graduates of temptations which befall pastors. They are not new. Paul warns Timothy against these same temptations. Dr. Whitney shared five temptations of which every pastor, young or old, must be aware.

MONEY: Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 6:9, “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.” Money, both the desire for it and the lack of it, takes our focus off our ministry and places it on worldly desires.

SEX: Easy access to sexually explicit material has given Satan a field day. The preoccupation with sex, pornography, and inappropriate sexual behavior which is so prevalent in our society can absorb our attention, tempt our base desires, and eventually ruin our ministry. A recent study states that “25-35 percent of ordained clergy are involved with inappropriate sexual behavior at some level.”

POWER: A desire to control everything is a powerful emotion that needs to be curbed. The move toward authoritarian leadership can happen gradually to the extent that we don’t even realize we are making demands that feed our own egos rather than people’s souls.

PRIDE: The heart of sin is our pride. The much used phrase of Prov. 16:18, “Pride goes before the fall,” holds true. We can also say pride was the result of the Fall. The Psalmist warns in Psalms 10:4: “In his pride, the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.” The greater influence God gives us, the easier it is to think of ourselves as important.

CYNICISM: Ministers work daily with people who claim to be Christians but don’t act like it. When those who are supposed to be God’s people mistreat you and when you see little apparent fruit in the lives of those for whom you’ve given your life, it’s easy to become cynical. No one’s testimony thrills you anymore. No book motivates you. No sermon moves you.

SUCCESS: It is more appealing to be a CEO than a shepherd, a manager than a minister. Success is interpreted through business eyes, with a focus on buildings, parking, land, customers and crowds rather than through farming eyes with the emphasis on sheep, fruit, and growing people.

Paul encourages Timothy and us: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in **these things**, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear.” (1Tim 4:16) What are “these things” Paul is encouraging us to persevere in? There is no ministry apart from the Scriptures. If we don’t take time to absorb Scripture and allow Scripture to be absorbed in us, there will be no opportunity to hear from Jesus. There will be no power to focus on the spiritual rather than the mundane. Don Whitney reminded the seminary graduates: “Don’t let the ministry keep you from Jesus!”

His continued warning rings in our ears. “If you wake up one day to realize that you are busier than you’ve ever been, but no deeper in the things of God than you were years ago; if you’ve become a religious professional, a minister who knows more about denominational politics than doctrine, who knows more about church growth pragmatism than prayer, and that you have become the kind of minister you once prayed you would never become ...” then get on your knees and seek God’s forgiveness and power. True repentance and the gift of forgiveness in Christ puts our ministry in the right perspective..

Take time to be a healthy leader. Be in God’s Word. Don’t only administer the sacraments; let the sacraments and God’s love minister to you.

“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1Tim. 6:11-12) ■