

A Stop by Quiet Waters
By
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“On Not Giving Up”

Recently I was talking with the pastor of a large church in New England about the challenges of pastoring today. He has pastored this church for twenty-five years. He said, “I love being a pastor, but it is no longer easy. The problems and challenges today are so much greater than I have ever faced before.” I understood and agreed because I have experienced the same thing in the past four decades. My role as a pastor became increasingly difficult and challenging beyond anything I had comprehended as a young man entering ministry. Later the same week I received an email from a pastoral friend informing me he had resigned from ministry and was not sure if or when he would return. He is part of the growing crisis among pastors in America today.

Studies reveal that 1500 pastors leave the ministry each month due to spiritual burnout, moral failure, or conflict in the church. That’s 18,000 every year. 70% of all pastors constantly fight depression. 50% are so discouraged they would leave the ministry today if they could, but have no other way of making a living. 70% of all pastors admit to not having a close friend, confident, or mentor standing with them as they endure the rigors of contemporary pastoral ministry.

Some of the pastoral struggles leading to these statistics include: religious pluralism which has negatively affected the convictions of many Christians; our affluent culture which makes it difficult to get a genuine hearing for the Gospel because of a love for money and material things; spiritual consumerism running rampant in the Christian community; a variety of special-interest groups in our churches with each one demanding the pastor focus on them; the perception of the pastor as the CEO of the church rather than the shepherd of the flock; the overload of demands placed on pastors; inadequate preparation given pastors for ministry in today’s culture; inadequate financial, emotional, and spiritual support provided them and their families; and an intensive spiritual attack against pastors by the powers of darkness.

The question is, **how do we endure until the end rather than give up?** There are several interwoven answers to this question, but let’s seek to answer it first by looking at our role from a biblical perspective rather than a cultural one. I am deeply concerned that we have lost sight of a primary teaching of our Lord and the Apostles regarding the nature of pastoral ministry.

First, as difficult as it is to pastor in America today it is still much easier than it was in the first century Roman Empire, or in many other places in our contemporary world. If we are so quick to give up here how long would we last in a situation where opposition and persecution are truly intense?

Second, do we believe we have been called by God to pastoral ministry? And, do we believe we have been called by God to the particular place of ministry in which we presently find ourselves? If we believe we have been called, we must continue to respond to that call with a wholehearted commitment to be and do all God has called us to, and we must be willing to accept the hardship that accompanies it.

Let's look at Paul as an example. As he traveled across ancient Asia Minor on his second missionary trip he was kept by the Lord from going to certain places he wanted to go to: "*But the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to [go there,]*" wrote Luke. He and his team eventually ended up in the city of Troas, on the shore of the Aegean Sea, where he had the vision of a man from Macedonia asking them to come over and help them.

They immediately set sail and then hiked inland to Philippi. To their surprise there was no synagogue in that city, just a place on the river bank where a few pious women met together to pray. As they walked the streets of Philippi day after day they were followed by a demented woman who kept crying out about them until Paul, in exasperation, rebuked the spirit in her and set her free. This led to a severe beating for Paul and Silas followed by imprisonment without their wounds so much as being treated. Where was the man of the vision? In fact, where were any of the men he was supposed to have come to bring the Gospel to? All they found were a few women and then a severe scourging and jail.

Here is a good case for twenty-first century American Christian philosophy to conclude that this could not have been a call from God after all. Seemingly nothing had gone right, they worked their tails off and had no fruit to show for it, and not even one man had come to faith in Jesus Christ. Locked in irons, unable to sleep because of the excruciating pain in their backs, they sang praises to God! How could they do this? What kept them from resigning and finding something else to do?

The answer: they knew they had been called by God to that ministry. So they committed themselves wholeheartedly to the call, and drew strength from the Spirit of God understanding and accepting the fact that hardship would be a factor in the life God called them to live.

The same is true for us as well. Jesus told us people would hate and oppose us because they hated and opposed him. Paul said to Timothy, "...*everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" The apostle John told us not to be surprised if the world hated us. James wrote, "*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*"

Peter wrote, "*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine,*" and, "*Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*" Peter, also wrote, "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed... Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*"

My dear brother or sister, the sufferings and hardships you are experiencing come with the territory and are the common lot of those who seek to follow Christ as his under-shepherds. I am not making light of your pain and suffering for I have been there. I left my first church, an unbelievably painful ministry, ahead of being voted out. At that time I told God, "If this is what

it is like serving you in the church I'll find another way." I took a job as a common laborer on a construction crew, but about 7-8 months later God spoke very clearly to my heart saying that He wanted me back in pastoral ministry.

When I took my second church I was deceived by the search committee into thinking they were going to improve the pastoral pay package at the annual meeting. I had told them the package they were offering was inadequate for my family's needs, and they assured me it would be dealt with at the annual meeting to be held one month after I arrived. I believed them. But they did nothing at that meeting, and because of the low pay we qualified for food stamps. We literally had to eat hot dogs and rice five days a week. I could afford only one tank of gas a week for our car, so walked as much as possible in order to have gas in case of an emergency requiring my presence as pastor.

In subsequent pastorates I have had church people tell lies about me, spread rumors, and write slanderous letters against me. I even had my life threatened by a deacon whom I had removed from office for moral failure, and had to have the church locks changed. Once I went through a period of harassing phone calls in the middle of the night. I have had people I considered dear friends tell me I had slipped into heresy and then leave the church. Other "friends" have angrily criticized my preaching, one telling me it was just a lot of "fluff." Many were the times when I wanted to give up and go somewhere else.

I tell you these things only so you will know I understand your pain, and that I am not being glib when I say such hardships come with the territory. We are not here to please men, or be liked by everybody, or to succeed in the eyes of men, but to faithfully serve our Lord. Peter Marshall, Jr., once said to me, "*Every time we step into the pulpit we must be willing to risk everything for the gospel.*" I agree.

Yes, it is harder to pastor in America today, possibly harder than it has ever been in the history of the country, which is why we need to be strong and faithful and not give up. We have a cloud of witnesses who have gone before us watching to see how we do now that it is our turn. Let us not be the generation that betrays the true pastoral calling of suffering for Christ that we might also be glorified with him. Let's learn afresh to listen more to the voice of the Spirit and the Word of God rather than the lying, deceiving voice of the evil one who speaks defeat into our minds and hearts. Let us encourage one another by supporting and praying with and for each other.

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Gal. 6:9 NIV

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Cor. 15:58 NIV

"Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!" Phil. 4:4 NIV

Peace and Joy in Christ,
Dick Germaine

Scripture Resources

“When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.” Acts 16:7-8 NIV

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” 2 Timothy 3:12 NIV

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” John 15:18,19 NIV

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” James 1:12 NIV

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21 NIV

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” 1 Peter 1:6,7 NIV

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 4:12, 13 NIV

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” 1 Peter 5:8,9 NIV

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