

CONCLUSION

The fallen pastor has always been viewed with special fascination by the public at large and has been a favorite subject of novelists and movie producers: the bad priest, the phony evangelist, the preacher who has lost faith in his own message. As pastors we can pick up many tricks of the trade from the commercial sector, from the advertising industry, and from the realm of entertainment. The problem, however, is not techniques learned from the world around us. Rather, the problem arises when we adopt a technological mind-set and begin to mimic the work of those in these sectors, coming to depend on “church craft,” with the loss of the spiritual nurturing of our soul that comes from the discipline of a life immersed in the Scriptures and in prayer, a life for which we are continually and continuously accountable.

Perhaps one of the most alarming unreported trends of our day is the stark statistic of pastoral attrition—multiplied thousands of times each year. Of the clerics who are terminated or who fall prey to the illness of moral failure, more than half will never return to ministry. Ongoing spiritual, physical, and ministerial health should be the priority of every denomination, church, elder and church board. Pastors must have support and genuine, loving accountability systems in place for the duration of their ministry. Both pastors who have experienced a lifetime of success or the disappointment of failure should be pooling their knowledge with today’s ministers and churches to promote clergy health. No issue should be left unaddressed or considered taboo.

Due to the trend of decreased weekly church attendance in the United States, pastors and church leaders must reexamine their churches’ polity and evaluate it for

efficiency. Again, there must be no “sacred cows,” nothing we cannot change if change will cause the local church to be more dynamic in its discipleship of believers and evangelism of the lost. Pastors who are graced by God with growth in numbers and in influence should expect exploitation and misrepresentation by the media. The only posture of protection for high-impact churches is full financial disclosure. Pastors must hold fast to the primacy of pastoring and not be led astray by causes, which can pollute, confuse, and distract from the Great Commission. As shepherds for God’s flock, pastors must carefully protect believers from misunderstanding and distractions that keep them from growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18).

Every precaution must be taken by pastors, elders, board members, and laity to morally protect their spiritual leaders. The highest standards of purity must be characteristic of every local church in its counseling and ministry outreaches. The greatest insurance against moral failure is pastors nurturing and enriching their marriages and families. This worthy objective requires the calculated, cooperative effort of pastors, elders, board members, and the entire church constituency. All must understand and respect the boundaries that are necessary for a physically and spiritually healthy pastor to minister for a lifetime and for the church to enjoy that benefit.

Innovation must be implemented in the local church with the attitude and intention of “bringing church to the people” instead of expectations about “people coming to the church.” We are living in a technologically advanced age that provides a plethora of opportunities that can be harnessed, and turned into opportunities for ministry, for teaching the world of God, and for evangelizing the lost. We must use every available method to reach every person we can reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every effective pastor can expect to be visited by severe trials. Just as an athlete prepares for Olympic competition, the pastor who is daring enough to reach the lost and instill a biblical world view in the hearts of his people must be prepared for a host of challenges, persecutions, and opportunities for further growth through adversity. God uses interesting tests and trials to create brokenness and spiritual dependency in his gifted servants. We must embrace these tests with thanksgiving, assured of God's sovereignty.

Nietzsche used to say that he had moved from the house of the scholars because his soul had sat empty at their table for too long. This unbelieving son of a pious Lutheran pastor, who later went insane, sounds a warning to Christian theologians, the scholars of the church. Those who know much but do not love, and who do not care deeply about the daily struggles of people, cannot lead us into the deeper biblical truths. In Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* we meet Willy Loman, the happy-go-lucky character who believed in the gospel of success and preached it to his sons. When, at the age of 63, the dream of big deals came crashing down like the castle of illusions it had always been, Willy killed himself. "He never knew who he was." In that one brief sentence his son gave Loman's spiritual biography.

Pastors must maintain ongoing soul care carefully monitored by wise, supportive elders and peers in genuine, loving, regular accountability. As God blesses a ministry, we must adopt John the Baptist's motto, "He must increase, and I must decrease." The role of the church is irreplaceable; consequently, we must utilize every available method for the propagation of the Gospel, but we must not lose its theological tenets and absolutes or be cowardly in their proclamation. A physician's continuing professional development is critical if he or she is to keep up with advances in medicine and with changes in the

delivery of care. All the more so, the pastor must be a lifelong student of the continued development of his theological, spiritual, marital, and pastoral acumen. And, again, trusted colleagues and mentors must monitor this process honestly. Haddon Robinson, who in 1996 was named in a Baylor University poll as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English-speaking world, remarked that a decent sermon takes 12–15 hours of preparation. Although Robinson never said that people told him mediocre teaching was the primary reason for their leaving a church, it is a huge factor. Patrick Reardon, one of Robinson's professors, taught him that too often pastors are intellectually lazy, and that the average evangelical pastor is not a man of the Scriptures. They are more interested in growth through marketing methods, but growth for growth's sake is the philosophy of the cancer cell. Pastors must stay welded to the Scriptures.

Finally, in no area do we discredit ourselves as Christians more clearly than in our treatment of pastors who have fallen. We must adopt restorative procedures and illustrate Christ's love by their application to our fallen brethren. After all, every church is a spiritual hospital. Denominations and seminaries must be proactive in the equipping ministry and must bring that ministry to pastors whose careers are in peril. "Men," observed Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées*, "never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." History, unfortunately, proves the truth of his assertion. By our redemptive, gracious spirit toward ministers who have failed, we will prove to the world that God is truly typified by the father whose every moment was consumed with his wayward son and who ran to embrace him upon his long-awaited return.

We carry a life-giving and eternally transformative message—the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we never forget that nothing, nothing, must sideline or sidetrack us from the evangelism and discipleship of the world. Contrast our noble calling from that of the sharp-witted playwright, George Bernard Shaw. Toward the end of his life, he made the following admission in *Too True to be Good*: “The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt ... Its counsels, which should have established the millennium have led directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshipers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith.”