

Pastors,

by Dana L. Goodnough

Don't Lose the Joy of the Ministry

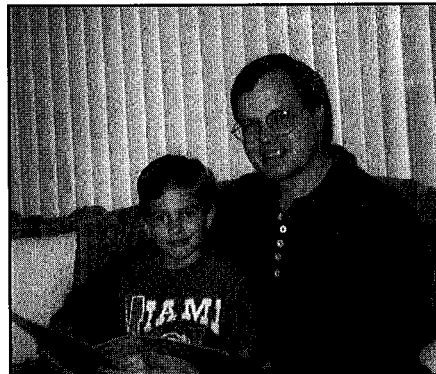
Let's face it. Pastoring a congregation of any size is no day at the beach! Every pastor knows the frustrations of demanding schedules, late-night meetings, strained family time, limited personal finances, and the everyday struggles of church life. Research shows that pastors face unprecedented hazards in ministry today.¹

In the midst of these pressures, it's all too easy to lose perspective. The joys of pastoral ministry seem elusive at best. But let's step back and see again the pastor's unique blessings. By reviewing the joys of ministry, we might find new strength in overcoming ministry hurdles.

Pastors Have a Unique Level of Prayer Support

As a pastor, I depend on the prayers of my church family for effectiveness in the ministry. Occasionally, someone will remind me, "Pastor, I pray for you every day." Obviously, people who are enduring special trials will receive daily prayer support from many church members. But who, other than the pastor and his family, receives consistent, daily, loving prayer support from so many people in the congregation? As pastors, we tend to be "obvious" objects of prayer. That's a blessing!

When I became a pastor, I enlisted the prayer support of several



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older women in our church. This personal prayer team lifts me—and my family—before the Lord every day. And I can sense the difference. Pastors need prayer, and we do have faithful members praying for us regularly.

Pastors Have Flexible Time Schedules

"You've got to be kidding! I don't have an ounce of time to call my own!" At least, this is what most pastors would conclude. But the reality of it is, we have more flexibility in our schedules than many of our church members. With a measure of advance planning and discipline, pastors can reserve time for special occasions.

Recently, I attended a premiere showing of "Jack and the Beanstalk" with my son's kindergarten class. Not many dads could free up a couple of hours on a weekday morning, but I had the privilege of sharing that time with my son.

Once a month, I reserve a day to spend time quietly with the Lord. Many church members would find it difficult at best to set aside an entire day for Bible reading, prayer, and reflection. But as a pastor, my time is more flexible.

I also enjoy eating lunch at home with my wife—a time luxury that helps make up for some of the other demands of the ministry.

Pastors Have Sharp, Growing Marriages

Most do, at least. Of course, we hear all too frequently about pastors who let their marriages go sour. A failed ministerial marriage makes headline news. But in reality, most pastors find that being in the ministry is actually beneficial to their family life.² In spite of the pressures, pastors can find great marital satisfaction in the midst of the ministry.

Why is this specifically a benefit of pastoral ministry? I suspect it has, at least in part, something to do with the pastor's counseling ministry. When I review basic principles of marriage for couples planning a wedding, or when I "coach"



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along a man and woman who are struggling in their marriage, I often go home with a new appreciation for my wife. In fact, she looks forward to my leading those premarital counseling classes. She knows I'll be a more sensitive husband (at least for a few weeks).

In addition, pastors and their wives often share the ministry load. Working together as a team in spiritual ministry can build a stronger marriage bond. After all, serving on the front lines together establishes a deep sense of commitment to one another.

Pastors Have the High Privilege of Regular Bible Study

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, one of Tevye's greatest joys (if he were a rich man) would be to "discuss the Holy Books with the learned men seven hours every day."³ Pastors are rich! We have the high privilege of studying God's Word in detail

on a daily basis. Sermon preparation is really a matter of studying the mind and heart of God as found in His Word. What a joy it is to open its pages, pull some "teachers" off the bookshelf, and pore over the pages of divine truth! Without a doubt, in every congregation there are men and women who would give anything to have this opportunity.

Along with the study of God's Word comes, of course, the personal spiritual challenge pastors face each week in applying the sermon's thought to their own hearts. Pastors cannot effectively preach truth that has not first been ingested personally. It's a great privilege to have God challenge us so richly.

Pastors Find God's High Mark of Approval

First Peter 5:4 promises a special crown for Christ's shepherds. Appreciation goes a long way. Many pastors don't find the encouragement from their congregations that they often need. But don't forget, God recognizes the sacrifices pastors make every day. Jesus Christ Himself holds pastoral ministry in

high regard. As pastors, we touch people's lives for time and eternity. The evidence might not be so evident to you now. But God rewards faithfulness. As Charles Spurgeon said, "The meanest work for Jesus is a grander thing than the dignity of an emperor."⁴

Being a pastor carries its risks. But it also has its joys. It has its privileges. It has its rewards. I think we can cheerfully echo Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:12. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service." □

¹ See *Pastors at Risk* by H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993).

² London and Wiseman, p. 100.

³ Harnick, Sheldon. *Fiddler on the Roof*. New York: Pocket Books, 1964.

⁴ Cited in *Gathered Gold* by John Blanchard (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1984), p. 284.

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