

# **THE RESILIENT PASTOR**

## **MONDAY MORNING PASTORING**

Secretary: Good Morning, Pastor John.

Pastor John: Morning (With a bit of tiredness in his voice)

Secretary: Here are your messages. Myra Burns called and wants you to call her right back...something about her latest ailment.. And, Jake Stockton also called. He says he wants to talk to the Elders. He made it sound like he's got some better ideas for ministry here at church. And only one more message--Charlie called and he can't make golf today. He said he's got a migraine.

Pastor John: (groaning largely to himself) Migraine...yes, I feel one coming on myself!

Just another "Monday morning" experience in the life of a pastor. It is an occupation that is filled with demands, many of which are unexpected, and can quickly distract from one's ministry role and goals.

## **A BEGINNING OF UNDERSTANDING**

One of the valuable, vital ingredients that is called for in the above scenario is resiliency.

One way to understand this valuable life ingredient is consider a basketball. There are several parallels to the life of a pastor—

1. This basketball is designed to have bounce.
2. It is the hidden air within the ball that is essential.
3. A deflated ball loses bounce-ability.
4. Keeping the ball properly inflated is an essential part of the ball's playability for the duration of the game.
5. Even a small leak in the ball will impact its bounce...and the greater the hole, the quicker the ball will go flat.
6. There is a need to check the air regularly to insure that the ball can stay in the game.

**THE PASTOR’S REAL WORLD—THE “HOLES”**

When it comes to the life of a pastor, what are “leaks” that can “deflate” a pastor’s “resiliency”? From your experience what are some of those “holes?”

HOLE	RATING*
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____

\*How much control does the average pastor have over these identified areas of “deflation?” In the line on the right, rank each “hole”, using the following scale “1”—“No control”...”5”—“Full Control”.

One of the greatest challenges faced by a pastor (as a human being) is to get overly distracted by “holes” that are out of their control. Significant “air” can be lost in the process. The energy for ministry can be lost.

It brings to mind two, parallel prayers related to the pursuit of “serenity”—

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know that is me.”

The following big “holes” were identified in a 2017 national survey of pastors, coordinated through Pastoral Care Inc. (Website—“Statistics for Pastors”)—

- +72% of pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- +80% believe pastoral ministry is negatively affecting their families.
- +78% of pastors report having their vacation and personal time interrupted with ministries duties and expectations.

- +52% of pastors feel overworked and cannot meet the church's unrealistic demands and expectations.
- +35% of pastors battle depression or fear of inadequacy.
- +70% of pastors they have a lower self-image than when they first started.
- +57% of pastors feel fulfilled but yet discouraged, stressed and fatigued.

God is well aware of the challenges faced by chosen leaders. His Word is filled with stories of those whose resiliency was challenged. Elijah is one of the “fallen ones.”

We find Elijah's story in 1 Kings. It begins with a “mountain top” experience in Chapter 18, as he celebrates the victory over the false prophets.

And then we have the “rest of the story” in the subsequent chapter. Elijah now faces a single opponent—Queen Jezebel. Yet Elijah finds himself overwhelmed and on the run. Filled with despair and fatigue he asks God to take his life (vs.4).

God's response is to provide sustenance to His chosen prophet (vss.5b-8a). He is now renewed and takes a 40-day journey to his next “mountain” (vs.8). It is here that God reminds Elijah of His presence...and His new calling (vss.9b-16).

We need to also consider Jesus' words to the “weary and burdened”—

““Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”” (Matthew 11:28)

And we can reflect on the relevant words of the apostle Paul—

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9)

### “RESILIENCY” STRATEGIES

The following are—“Seven Strategies For Sustained Resiliency” for pastors—

1. Consistent boundaries in one's schedule. This is enhanced by proper delegation of duties to others. Making room for “No.” Acknowledge and express personal limits. [Also see the section on page 6 regarding “boundaries.]\*
2. A priority placed on resiliency. Beyond God as a Primary Resource, this places a strong emphasis on friendships, support and accountability.

3. Transparency when it comes to areas of stress and tension. Have a “go to” confidant that is accessible.
4. Personal, daily devotion time.
5. Proper use of “care-frontation” (“speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15a)) in addressing conflict.
6. Accepting one’s limitations when it comes to expectations. Work within one’s God-given skills and spiritual gifts. God never endowed any leader with “all things for all situations.
7. Never be afraid to say “I need help”. Being a part of a pastor support group, or counseling, can be valuable.

### GOD’S BIBLE STORIES & RESILENCY

God gives ample examples of resiliency in His Word. These examples offer us insights regarding the key ingredients for “bounce” in our ministry.

We find the example of Moses in Exodus 18, especially verses 5 & 13-26. Here we learn four valuable, timeless lessons for God’s chosen leaders—

1. Sometimes it’s an outsider who clearly sees a need.
2. Leaders have limits (that are often overlooked).
3. Delegation offers a solution when circumstances are overwhelming.
4. God’s agenda is that everyone’s needs get met through the full range of available resources.

Go back and reflect on the story of Elijah shared earlier. We find relevant examples of resiliency in 1 Kings 18 & 19. God provided the provision and direction this prophet needed to continue in his calling. He would not do ministry alone.

It can be helpful to consider two, parallel “stories”—

1. We have God’s divine story—His perfect plan to accomplish His mission on earth. It is on-going and perfect it is not interrupted by human interference and misunderstanding. It is always Good Ordery Direction.

2. We also find the human story. God involves human beings in the fulfillment of His divine story. Humans, however, are fallible and fickle. They often misinterpret God's intentions ...and seek their own agenda. It frequently includes human E-G-O—Edging God Ot (this standing in the way of Good Ordery Direction).

Now we come to the most noteworthy of examples when it comes to true resiliency. We find Christ Himself. In His life we find the following realities which offer hope to those who minister today—

1. Jesus was willing to delegate through the use of disciples.
2. When faced with temptation Jesus relied on the Word of God.
3. He modeled regular prayer and rest.
4. He had a very clear mission and kept it in daily focus.
5. When Jesus met multiple challenges He took them on one-by-one.
7. He used care-frontation when He dealt with the critics of His day.
8. Jesus knew his limits and acknowledged them to His Father.
9. Jesus maintained boundaries and balance in His ministry.
10. He sought help when He was in need.

### BALANCE IN MARRIAGE & MINISTRY

When one reads the pastoral letters from Paul, something become very evident. God places a high priority on marriage and family (See 1 Timothy 3:1-5).

This is a priority to God because He places a high priority on love relationships. He is also the Author of marriage and family...and the church—His three “love institutions.” He desires Good Orderly Direction in all three. Leaders in all three are held in a higher level of responsibility.

Rank order the following tied to Jesus' teaching from Matthew 6:33 & 22:37-40) (with "1" being the highest from God's point of view)--

Self \_\_\_\_                      Marriage/Family \_\_\_\_  
 God \_\_\_\_                      Ministry \_\_\_\_

\*Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend are well-known authors in the area of boundaries in relationships. In their popular book, *Boundaries* we find these "Ten Laws of Boundaries" (which can be valuable to pastors and their spouses)—

Law 1—The Law of Sowing and Reaping: We are personally responsible for our own actions and the consequences of those actions.

Law 2—The Responsibility "for" and "to" Law: We are responsible for our own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. When we take responsibility for someone else, we keep them in an immature state.

Law 3—The Law of Power and Powerlessness: We cannot change anyone else, but we can change our self with God's help.

Law 4—The Law of Receiving Other's Boundaries: We need to hear other people's no.

Law 5—The Law of Motivation: Boundaries help us gain control of our own lives and fulfill what we are created for --love. When we have the proper motivation, we experience freedom and responsibility.

Law 6—The Law of Evaluating the Pain Caused By Your Boundaries: There is a difference between hurt and harm.

Law 7—The Law of Proactive Versus Reactive Boundaries: Proactive means freely choosing to love, enjoy, and serve one another. Reactive means letting someone else define and direct who we are and what we do.

Law 8—The Law of Envy: Envy is seeing the good as that which we do not have.

Law 9—The Law of Activity: Boundaries are created in our lives when we do something. We must take initiative and accept responsibility for our feelings, attitudes, and behavior.

Law 10—The Law of Exposure: Internal boundaries need to be visible and communicated to others.

It is valuable to evaluate oneself in the above Laws. Place a “X” by those that need your special attention, starting today.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Now that you have taken the time to read this article, it is valuable to consider how what you have learned will impact your life. Identify personal actions steps you will take following today’s training—

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[For additional insights search the web sites under-- “Resiliency in Ministry.”]

**“THOSE WHO HOPE IN THE LORD WILL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH. THEY WILL SOAR ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES; THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GROW WEARY, THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BE FAINT.” (ISAIAH 40:31)**

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## **“HURT” PASTORS...”HURT PEOPLE”**

In Sandra D. Wilson’s book, *Hurt People Hurt People*, a chapter is devoted to “Help for Healing Leaders”. In this chapter are insights regarding how past, childhood experiences of ministers can impact their ministry in “hurtful” ways.

A part of Dr. Wilson’s concern regards the size of the audience that is under the influence of the minister. The broad base of influence can be significant; and because of the power within the ministry position, the “hurtful” influence can be destructive in many ways.

Here are some of this author’s insights—

“If the level of our unseen wounds and power are both high, but our level of commitment to self-awareness and truthfulness are low, we are extremely dangerous leaders.”

“The question about our wounds is not *if* we have them, but *what* are they, *where* did we get them, and *how* deep are the scars? When we forget this truth, whether as leaders or as followers, we are dangerous and vulnerable.”

“The marks of leaders likely to hurt followers include, among other things, confusion about authority and approval, conflict about fans or friends and family, and compromise to preserve a place at the pedestal.”

In regard to the last statement, authority and approval can be areas of vulnerability for those who have been “hurt” as children. She refers to such leaders as “approval-seeking servants”. These childhood experiences can also lead a minister to pay more attention to his “fans” (those who give him consistent approval, and from whom approval is sought) vs. his friends and family (who are often taken for granted). And, lastly, there is a tendency to desire the “pedestal” (limelight) role in one’s life (and the ministry offers many of these opportunities).

These specific, select concerns are offered—

“...public-focused, platform-people seem to want fans more than friends, respect more than relationships, and influence more than intimacy.”

“The more performance-based our self-concepts, the more we tend to focus on high profile activities (whether paid or voluntary). And let’s face it, most “at home” stuff is low profile from the world’s viewpoint.”

The following “Public Performer’s Family Contract” is shared (from the “hurtful performer’s” perspective)—

\*“We understand that I and my public performance are more important than anyone or anything else in this family.

\*We understand that I will be preoccupied with giving my all to my public performance.

\*We understand that I need to hear of your support, but not your struggles. We understand that I cannot be there for you.

\*We understand that all of you are essentially on your own.

\*We understand that you are expected to totally deny all of your personal needs.”

What are specific risks within the role of pastor that are evident from the above insights?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

An “antidote” is also offered in this chapter. Dr. Wilson references J.I. Packer’s book--*Rediscovering Holiness*. In it he refers to “humble self-suspicion” He uses Christ as the Model for holiness; and, as Dr. Wilson goes on to summarize—

“This means staying off pedestals, small or large, it means repeatedly telling the truth about our flaws, failures, and on-going struggles as we attempt to live authentically for Christ. This also means remaining humbly self-suspicious as well as honestly self-aware.”

It is prayed that these insights will give guidance and encouragement to all for whom this information applies.