

Do Pastors Feel?

By Melanie Stone

Do pastors feel? It may seem like a ridiculous question - of course pastors feel. However, a pastor is often a person of fortitude and may seem to be impervious to injury or impairment. A leader's drive is usually strong and focused, often appearing undistracted by emotion. A spiritual leader is typically in control and confident when giving instruction or correction, perhaps perceived to be unaffected by the behaviors, attitudes and words of the people they oversee.

Hopefully a pastor is wired with a strength to endure difficulty, concentrated on the vision without diversion and spiritually developed to rule over their flesh; however, being a strong leader does not mean a pastor is void of emotion. Being focused doesn't mean there aren't underlying feelings. Being mature doesn't mean desires of the soul and body aren't a challenge for the pastor.

The truth is, good leaders often put their concerns secondary to the needs of the people they serve. Pastors usually confide in other pastors who can empathize from shared experience and mutual understanding. If you are a pastor, co-pastor, associate or campus pastor, then hopefully you have a support system and are not isolated and alone when navigating ministry.

Bible Leaders

We look to the Word of God for understanding for spiritual leadership. The Bible records the emotions of many leaders. Here are a few leadership examples:

David shared his frustrations in the Psalms.¹

Deborah was grateful.²

Elijah was depressed.³

Jonah was resentful.⁴

Jesus cried at Lazarus tomb.⁵

Jesus was angry with the selling of sacrifices.⁶

Paul expressed having fear.⁷

The men and women in the Bible are no different from us. We all have the capacity to feel and communicate with expression. Their ability to feel did not necessarily signal weakness; their emotions showed they were human. Emotions are not negative. They are a gift from God to express what is going on in the soul. To be healthy in ministry, the soul needs to be whole. If emotional health is compromised, it can affect the leaders' ability to lead. God cares about the wellbeing of His servant-leaders.

¹ Psalm 137:9

² Judges 5:3

³ 1 Kings 19:4

⁴ Jonah 4

⁵ John 11:35

⁶ Matthew 21:12

⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:3

What Can Pastors Feel?

Pastors are on the frontline, taking the brunt force of spiritual attack and shouldering the primary responsibility to care for people. Pastors carry the weights and feel the pressures of leadership. They feel both joys and sorrows.

Here are some of the feelings that leaders may feel in their personal life as well as their ministry:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraged• Accepted• Valued• Supported• Happy• Comforted• Forgiven• Blessed• Graced• Strong• Confident• Empathic• Merciful• Rested• Peace• Love• Joy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hurt• Rejected• Abandoned• Betrayed• Sad• Grieved• Unappreciated• Pressured• Stressed• Lonely• Guilty• Shamed• Afraid• Anxious• Angry• Overwhelmed• Exhausted
---	---

There is a grace God has given to the leader that comes when the leader is functioning in his or her role. It doesn't make leaders immune to the possibility of emotional distress.

What Happens When Pastors Suffer in Silence

Not all suffering is bad. Suffering can bring about a surrender where God shapes us to become more like Him. Like a fiery furnace, suffering can burn off what is not of God and mature us to become more like Christ. There is an emotional discomfort that can bring us to a place of dying to self in a greater measure so that Christ's resurrection power can be at work in us and through us.

When suffering becomes detrimental, a leader can lose effectiveness. Suffering in silence can cause a pastor to fail to receive the wholeness he or she needs personally. A hurting leader can become a dysfunctional leader, to be on guard, to lose faith, to become bitter or hardened and ineffective. Also, when a pastor has been burned more than once, it is possible for that pastor to go into survival mode, becoming numb or uncaring, just going through the motions.

How Pastors Can Stay Emotionally Healthy

1. Pursue God's Presence

Worship is one of the best ways to stay open before our Father. Jesus was always withdrawing from the crowds to be alone with God. If Jesus did it, so should we. The Father knows how to meet our emotional needs and restore our souls. The Father knows us better than anyone, so transparency is possible. He loves us unconditionally, so there is no fear in a humble, honest approach to the throne of God.

2. Allow yourself to feel

God made us with emotion. He wants us to use our feelings to express the condition of our soul with Him and with people who are trustworthy. Pastors need a safe place where they can be genuine and not judged.

3. Pray

In those times of being in God's Presence, pastors should pray and ask God to make them whole in those areas where they might be suffering. Look to Jesus and get His perspective.

4. Seek wisdom from other pastors

Every person was designed to be connected in the Body of Christ. We are made to benefit one another through our relationships. Leaders are not exempt from this principle. Having relationships with people is important. It is a treasure to find someone you can relate to, someone who understands a leader's viewpoint.

5. Be selective

Jesus ministered to the multitudes – thousands, in fact. He had several people that followed Him, people He knew and loved. However, when it came to deeper relationships, Jesus had His team of twelve disciples. From that twelve we see a few occurrences where He pulled away with three of them. It was literally be impossible for Jesus to be close friends with every He met. Associates that know you and care for you will help you thrive in ministry.

6. Be confident in your position

If a pastor lacks confidence in their position in Christ or their role and responsibilities as a pastor, guilt, shame or fear could allow a pastor to be manipulated emotionally by people who have their own interests in mind.

7. Be a God-pleaser

Jesus said that everything He did and said was from His Father. If the Father didn't lead Him to do something, Jesus didn't do it. If we are looking for the approval of people and don't get it; it can be emotionally harmful.

The same is true for the pastor's family. The perspective of life and the church is different for them. They have feelings that should not be pushed down or neglected. It is wise for those in a pastor's home to have a source of expression and communication in a safe place.

For longevity in ministry, pastors need to be whole in their soul. If you are a pastor, pay attention to yourself and your family. If you are a church member, pray for your pastor. The kingdom of God needs healthy leaders!