

Spiritual Leadership and Ministry in Times of Personal Crisis

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Ministry training usually includes learning how to minister in times of personal crisis—but the crises are usually in the lives of others. A great challenge in ministry arises when a minister or church leader must deal with times of crisis in his own life. What does authentic ministry look like when those who serve are themselves in crisis mode? When church leaders are embroiled in controversy, when families struggle, when conflicts arise, when change overwhelms—how does authentic, effective ministry come forth out of such circumstances?

It is inevitable that those in church leadership will experience times of crisis in their personal and family lives. Such situations include the death of loved ones, serious accidents, poor choices by children or grandchildren, and even marriages going through times of turmoil. The list can be lengthened considerably when one adds the normal frustrations and challenges of interpersonal relationships when people disagree and experience misunderstandings and conflicts. Spiritual leaders are not immune from the impact of “life changing events.” How church leaders deal with such crises impacts effectiveness in fulfilling ministry and leadership responsibilities. Responses are observed by the members of the church. Here are a few suggestions to help ministers and spiritual leaders over the rough spots.

Have a mentor or confidant.

Many preachers and elders do not have a close friend or confidant to whom they can turn in times of difficulty. It is often inappropriate to turn to those inside the church, and spiritual connections outside the local congregation are frequently lacking. Without friends and mentors outside the local congregation, there may be no one to turn to for help and guidance during times of crisis. In dealing with crisis situations appropriately, asking a trusted friend for input is often an essential first step.

Believe in other people—let the church be the church.

Preachers have left churches, and left ministry, because of problems in their families. Many times ministers are embarrassed to talk about their personal problems with their elders or church leaders. It is easier to flee to another place where the problems are not known. Such behaviors keep preachers from experiencing the healing power of a local congregation filled with brothers and sisters who understand and care. Elders are equally prone to withdraw. Some resign from the eldership; even more tragic are those who resign from church work and involvement. When ministers and elders fail to lead by example in letting the church provide a support system in times of difficulty, the members often follow their example. The church is hindered in becoming the kind of loving family and support system it can be. The greatest tragedy is that some who were formerly good church leaders and ministers (and members) are now on the outside looking in, no longer faithful in their Christian walk.

Handle problems according to biblical principles.

The Bible is still our guide, and our best guide, for handling problems and crises. Church leaders teach a great lesson when they do what they know to do, and follow the instructions of Scripture.

Such instructions may include dependence on God, prayer, family support, relationship building, reconciliation, and many other biblical themes.

Be an example.

Over the years, I have been reminded that my example of dealing with times of crisis has been helpful to others. Others have expressed appreciation in seeing that I could be vulnerable in sharing my pain and asking for prayer, and in modeling my trust in our God who cares and helps us through painful times. Some have mentioned after the fact that my example in going for counseling or taking appropriate time off to attend to family matters was a helpful pattern for them in their times of crisis. Sometimes, we tend to think that our time away from the church and from preaching will hurt our ministry. Most times, I have observed just the opposite. The work of ministry goes on quite well without us, and we are able to return and function better after we take care of ourselves and our family.