

Pastoral Self-Care

By Dr. Craig Loving

We pastors have a crucial stake in the matter of pastoral self-care. If we want to succeed over the long haul, we need to take care of ourselves spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

- **Spiritual self-care:** We dare never become casual about our own life in Christ. Bible study and prayer in preparation for a sermon are no substitute for Bible study and prayer to feed our own souls. We must be careful to apply both the Law and the Gospel to ourselves before we carry it to others. Romans 1-8 should be the personal manifesto of every pastor.
- **Emotional self-care:** A man needs to take a long, hard look about his motivation for going into the ministry. Studies consistently show that many clergy (and people in other helping professions) have come from troubled families of origin. Some writers suggest that we hear God's call to ministry out of our own brokenness (2 Corinthians 1). The problem is not with our backgrounds, but what we pretend not to see. Until we come to terms with the wounds we've experienced, chances are we'll unknowingly seek to avoid similar situations in the present or try to heal yesterday's wound by today's activities. Neither are good choices. Instead, see the past for what it was; call it by name. Unhook yourself from any blame that isn't yours to carry; ask forgiveness for any that is. Forgive the offender. Grieve the loss. Sit at the foot of the cross for a while. And for an even longer while at the empty tomb. **Then** go minister.
- **Physical self-care:** Old Chinese proverb: "He who burns both ends of the candle is not very bright." How are you taking care of yourself physically? Do you take at least one day off a week? How much sleep and exercise do you get? How's your time alone with your wife? What does your caloric intake look like? How are your cholesterol and blood pressure levels? When was your last physical? While we can't prolong our lives by worry (Matthew 6), we certainly will shorten it by neglecting God's gift of our physical bodies.

Ultimately, these matters will affect the quality and perhaps the length of our ministry.

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