

Stressful times at church? Do what I say, not what I do!

As we head into Fall, one of two busiest times of the year for pastors, I'm reminded of an online survey I came across recently. In a list of the most stressful jobs you can have, being a minister came in as one of the top ten.

When I mention the stressful nature of ministry to people outside of the church, many are surprised, even taken aback, "If they think being a minister is stressful, they should come work at my place!"

Pastors, though, aren't surprised at all. They're resigned to the fact that they're going to be stressed. It's almost like a trophy to be able to say, "I'm so stressed" or "I'm booked solid," or "I don't have a free moment at my church."

When I put my coach's hat on, I become curious. Is this really the way it has to be? How else could it be? What can we DO about it?

Actually, that's the real problem; right there. We're doing too much. We're doing all of the time. We never stop doing.

Theologians might dispute me on this, but I often wish there was a Bible printed that had the time lines between when Jesus acted and didn't act. In the 30 + years spanning Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, we would see that Jesus spent far more time resting, walking, thinking and being than doing, doing, doing.

In fact, we can learn a lot from how Jesus took care of himself. What did he do?

1. He walked
2. He hung out with friends
3. He read the Scriptures
4. He took naps
5. He walked away even though he wasn't finished
6. He got mad – good and angry
7. He went to church
8. He prayed
9. He had fun, went to parties and played with children
10. He took his time and paced himself



It's less about what we're doing and more about how we're being. How can we go from being resigned (to settle for this stressful life) to being resolved (to change it)?

As church leaders, we teach and preach to our congregation that they change their habits and practice self-care, but we don't always do it ourselves. As the saying goes, we clearly need to "practice what we preach." When we finally get that, everything falls into place. Because we already know exactly what to do—we tell people how to do this all the time.

A saying among pastors is that Christianity is more caught than taught. We really have to model it. The lessons aren't real unless they see them in us. What will it take for us to hear those same lessons, and for us to take those same steps?

Start by asking yourself what you would do to encourage someone in your community who was resolved to change their over-stressed ways? How can you take that advice yourself? How could you calmly navigate this year's "crunch" time of Fall programs and back-to-school and other pressures?

When we're in a position of leadership, we may fool ourselves into thinking we're not accountable for our personal choices, as long as we're doing our job. Nothing could be further from the truth. When we ignore our self-care, we're not fooling anyone. It shows, and then it catches. Is that really what you want to be spreading?



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Ph: 610-385-8034 | Fax: 484-944-1520 | val@coaching4clergy.com | www.coaching4clergy.com