

# Why is Church Work So Difficult?

by Gary Molander

Instead of quitting ministry, discover ways to process the ongoing feelings of stress, anxiety and unfulfilled expectations you encounter.

Being a full-time pastor was the most difficult profession I've ever experienced.

I loved the people I served alongside, and God did some amazing things. But it was so taxing on me—emotionally, physically and spiritually. I almost lost my family. For many pastors and leaders who get paid by their churches, they'd mostly agree. And while there are many reasons why this is true, I have an opinion about it.

**My thinking revolves around three truths, all which build on each other.**

**TRUTH #1: People who work in churches originally got into this line of work to have a direct impact on the world.**

The two key words in that statement are “direct” and “world.” Sit on those for a few more seconds, and stay with me.

**TRUTH #2: The primary biblical calling for pastors and church leaders is to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11ff).**

People who work in churches directly influence believers in their churches, but only indirectly impact the world outside. Most pastors I know have to force any direct impact on the world, and mostly on their off-time. This is where they coach in community sports leagues, volunteer in community arts programs and attend civic events.

**TRUTH #3: Many pastors and church leaders never experience the primary reason they got into ministry in the first place, because their primary calling doesn't allow them to *directly* impact the world.**

They're too busy equipping their church members to do that.

And that's exactly where the disconnect happens—direct vs. indirect impact and influence.

When we experience this disconnect, the easy thing to do is to blame our next-rung leaders for making pastoral ministry so difficult. The *really* easy thing to do is to blame the senior pastor for everything. And that's tragic.

The most honest thing many church workers can admit to is this:

**“This ministry thing isn't what I thought it would be. My dreams are always somewhere else, and my influence isn't landing where I had once hoped. I never knew it would be like this.”**

I hear so many stories of so many ex-pastors and so many ex-church leaders who are so bitter and so angry at the church. And honestly, I wonder if that bitterness and anger is really a complex and individual set of unfulfilled expectations that's been brewing for years—one that feels like it should be someone else's fault but actually isn't.

These are hard and difficult themes to probe, because they're more than themes. They're dreams and desires and hopes. They're more personal than we could ever express. They keep us up at night and cause us to consider any realistic option for employment elsewhere.

But this post is not a plea for anyone to quit church ministry. It's a plea to prayerfully process the ongoing feelings of stress, anxiety and unfulfilled expectations. It's a plea to see the problem in the light of Scripture, not in the light of blame. If you're a pastor or church leader, and if a church signs your paycheck, your primary (and biblical) responsibility is to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**. There is no getting around that.

You will touch the world, to be sure. But you'll touch it through other people, and probably won't see the effects of your touch this side of eternity.

*What about you? How are you doing with this whole thing?*

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