

# MARITAL PRESSURES FACED BY LEADERS: HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

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## Introduction:

Kingdom leaders will face pressures. It's part of the calling. The Apostle Paul experienced pressure in his ministry (II Corinthians 1:8-11; 11:28). Pressures in the ministry often affect the leader's personal life, including their relationship with God, their spouse and family, and the congregation.

Pressures come for various reasons. Pressures may be the result of spiritual attacks of Satan or they may come because of unwise choices we make in life. In other words, some pressures we bring upon ourselves through inappropriate actions. Satan may get blamed for things that are not his fault. But then he will use these pressures to drain our marriage and ultimately our life and ministry of the abundant life that is ours in Christ (John 10:10).

The purpose of this lesson is to bring to light pressures that leaders face and look at some practical ways to overcome them. This outline is not meant to be a Bible study on overcoming pressures although we do need God's help and instruction from His Word in these matters.

Here are some current statistics regarding pastoral ministry: (Compiled from: [Leading Turnaround Churches](#) by Gene Wood, Church Smart Resources, St. Charles, IL 60174)

These statistics help us to understand some of the pressures that many pastors face. Gene Wood begins these statistics with the following comment: "*Pastors are crumbling like sandcastles on the beach.*"

- Each month more than 1200 pastors [in the U.S.] leave the ministry due to stress, church related issues, family issues, or burnout.
- More than 1300 pastors [in the U.S.] each month are forcibly terminated without just cause.
- Sixty-seven percent of pastor's wives say they're dissatisfied with their marriage.
- Seventy percent of pastors say they don't have someone they consider to be a close personal friend.
- Seventy-one percent of pastors say they're having personal financial problems. [This is often because of a lack of adequate financial support].
- The burnout rate is at an all time high with only fifty percent of pastors completing their working years as a pastor.

- Seventy-five percent of pastors spend less than one evening per week with spouse or friends.

These are startling statistics. Demands of leadership are becoming increasingly great. When a pastor is under stress, it affects not only their personal individual life but also their family and the congregation.

Leaders are called to set a Godly example in every aspect of life. It takes a special effort, by God’s grace, to overcome the challenges, not only of ministry, but of marriage in the context of ministry. The marital pressures faced by leaders that follow are certainly not exhaustive. You may add to the list and bring additional insights from your experience.

The “pressure” will be listed (in some cases with a bit of description) followed by ideas on how to overcome the pressures. The answers are not always simple. In some cases, issues are so challenging that it may take special counseling on how to overcome the pressures.

## 1. TIME DEMANDS

*“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, **making the most of your time**, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16 – NASB).*

Sometimes it seems there are not enough hours in a day. Because of so much demand on time, marriages often suffer. How can we overcome this pressure?

- A. Cultivate quality time with the Lord (This will be discussed later)
- B. Organize schedule with your spouse. If you don’t make a plan for your time, someone else will.
- C. Plan for quality time together
  - a) As a couple
    - go on a date once a week, once a month, depending on your circumstances
    - be creative on what you do – you do not have to spend a lot of money
    - share meals together
    - play together
  - b) As a family
    - children feel secure when mom, dad, and family are all together having fun
    - choose a family night and stick to it (unless legitimate interruption)
      - time when the focus is on the family
      - play games together
      - go for a walk in the park
      - make a meal together
      - go on a picnic

D. Plan for free time/recreation

## 2. EXPECTATIONS

*“Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another”* (Ephesians 5:21 – Msg).

One of the biggest reasons for conflict (pressure) in a marriage, home, ministry, or any relationship is undefined expectations. Expectations need to be identified, discussed, and evaluated from time to time.

A. Identify expectations (what are some of them)

- pastor is perfect
- should have all the answers
- should work with salary enough to survive (barely)
- has a perfect wife and children
- shouldn't need too much time off/just what does he do?
- always be available
- have the perfect marriage
- wife should give up her husband for meetings and activities almost every night. She should take care of herself and the children so as not to put too much pressure on her husband
- she should also be at all the meetings of the church
- she should head up the woman's group, the prayer chain, play the piano for worship, and teach the children's Sunday School or fill in when other teachers don't show up

B. Discuss and define expectations with one another

- for each other in the marriage – (one of the biggest causes of conflict is undefined expectations)
- for each other in the home
- for each other in the ministry

C. Take time occasionally to evaluate expectations.

- how is it going?
- what needs to be changed?
- in what area(s) are we still lacking clarity?

## 3. INTEGRITY

*“The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him”* (Proverbs 20:7).

*“May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you” (Psalm 25:21)*

Because of pressures in ministry, leaders are often confronted with issues of personal integrity. This can come about because a leader may feel pushed into a corner with no way out. Because of fear or shame, one doesn't want to discuss their pressures. Or, maybe life is just too busy. “I must do the work of the Lord.” Meanwhile, because of not dealing with pressures in the right way, integrity issues may increase, resulting in more pressures to the point the pressure seems overwhelming.

A. Identify the weak areas in your life

- inappropriate contact with persons of the opposite sex (counseling, phone, travel, etc.)
- wasted time – running here and there throughout the day – checking the internet...
- sexual temptation – internet or otherwise

B. Develop system of accountability

- be accountable to spouse
- be accountable to church
- be accountable to appropriate person on integrity issues

#### **4. FINANCES**

*“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Luke 16:13).*

*Speaking to the people, he went on, “Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot” Luke 12:15 (Msg)*

In America, financial problems are one of the leading causes of conflict in marriages, often leading to divorce. Leaders, often because of inadequate salaries, are faced with a dilemma. While they have their own needs, they also see many others in the church with financial crisis and feel inadequate to help. If God called us to ministry, He will provide. We must be faithful stewards of that which He has given. His wisdom is sufficient to help us through any financial challenges we may be facing. Sometimes we blame Satan for our woes when all we need is a bit of common sense to make wise financial decisions.

A. Discuss financial plan with your spouse

- make a budget
- stick to the budget
- define expectations on how money will be spent (what are limits?)
- keep clear records (IRS guidelines)
- pay bills on time
- avoid unnecessary spending
- use credit card(s) only for convenience (if necessary) and not for unwise spending

- B. Trust God for your needs
- C. Be honest with church overseers/elders if there is a special need or financial crisis

## 5. LONLINESS

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry” (Psalm 34:15).

*“Who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows”* (2 Corinthians 1:4-5).

Leaders, especially spouses, often feel lonely and don’t have close friends. Who can they relate too? Furthermore, once again because of time constraints, how can they cultivate friendships? Maybe instead of a special friend, it is wise to be surface friends with everyone. Is that wise?

### A. Determine appropriate friends

- with whom can you confide?
- with whom can you enjoy some recreation or good fellowship?

### B. Discover root causes of loneliness

- past hurts
- rejection or betrayal
- mistrust
- oppression
- discouragement

## 6. ENJOYING GOD

Westminster Confession says: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” John Piper says, “He doesn’t believe the theologians were saying two things but rather making one statement. A truer interpretation would be: The chief end of man is to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.”

*“One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple”* (Psalm 27:4).

Cultivating a personal intimacy with God is perhaps one of the biggest pressures leaders face. Time demands and pressures are again a factor. What about that early meeting that robbed your normal quiet time? What about the phone calls, the e-mails, the need to take a child to school, get the car to the garage for repairs, go get the bottle of milk your wife needs for breakfast...and the list of interruptions goes on and on and on...

A. Plan for quality time for enjoying God and spending special time in His presence. Why?

- foundational for overcoming daily pressures
- the closer we are to God the closer and more intimate we will be with our spouse
- true ministry comes from the overflow of our love relationship with God
- we gain perspective on how to face pressures
- we gain insight on marriage and family issues

B. Practice God's presence constantly

- take little breaks throughout the day to reflect on God
- converse with Him, while driving or any activity
- when or normal time of meeting with the Lord in a special way is robbed, take another block of time

## CONCLUSION

These are some pressures that leaders in ministry face. What are some additional pressures that you face?

Action:

1. Out of all the pressures above, what are two or three that you deal with the most? List them.
2. Make a plan of action to overcome the pressure. Write the plan. Discuss the plan with your spouse or other appropriate person.
3. How do you practice accountability in your life?

Remember, Satan will do everything in his power to cause the pressures. We need to be alert to his ways. However, we have a greater ONE is us who is willing to guide us, assist us, and help us overcome unnecessary pressures.

*“So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*  
-Isaiah 41:10

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).*