

3 "Check Engine" Lights for Pastors

Discipleship is core to what we do as a church.

However, discipleship represents something much more than a program. Discipleship is something bigger than an institution that "organizes" a process for spiritual growth.

We are the church, and we are disciples!

That represents a significant challenge; how to organize something in the natural realm that inherently belongs in the supernatural realm.

This is a huge subject. And, I'd like to focus on a specific slice of the discipleship arena, centering on these three questions:

- How do you as the pastor live above the warning signs?
- How do you as the pastor personally fit into a process of discipleship?
- How do you as the pastor or church staff member, develop your spiritual vitality?

One "simple" answer is, "participate in a small group." That's good, and can work well, but it usually ends up with the pastor (or staff member) leading the group. So now the pastor is back to leading and organizing which can lessen the personal spiritual impact.

Another solution is, "get in an accountability group." That's good too, but most often those groups are not designed to make intentional forward and measured progress. They are more open than structured, and usually designed to keep a check on what is happening in the present.

This reality can leave the pastor and staff of the church without an intentional spiritual growth process.

It's often difficult to discern the level of your spiritual growth when you are professionally immersed in spiritually oriented church work.

The following are three warning signs of your personal spiritual vitality.

3 warning signs to pay attention to:

1) Past training begins to cover for lack of current freshness.

Putting a price tag on great training and experience is hard. They are truly invaluable.

But there is also a risk. That theological training and ministry experience you have as the spiritual leader may place you ahead of many in the congregation, much like a doctor knows more about medicine or a lawyer has studied the law.

However, if the doctor or lawyer relies on what they learned years ago, they will lack the necessary freshness to what is new in the field, and they can lose touch or even become irrelevant.

It's true that scripture doesn't change like medicine or law. But we change, culture changes, and we engage every person right where they're at in the moment. In fact, scripture says about itself, "... the word of God is alive and active." Hebrews 4:12

There is a certain "freshness" about what God is doing today that matters. Including in your personal spiritual life as a pastor.

2) Leadership responsibilities begin to choke out growth in your faith.

The ideal picture is that the larger our respective responsibilities grow, the greater our dependence upon God becomes.

However, it's all too common that the great beauty of the church becomes more of the beast. Or, it sometimes feels that way. But I assure you, the church is a thing of amazing beauty. So, when it looks or feels like the beast, it's time to discern why.

Part of the why is that you are intricately involved in a never-ending process of helping people grow in their faith. And the irony is that you as the pastor can end up spiritually dry.

The *good* squeezes out the great. It's good to serve and minister. But it's *great* to foster spiritual intimacy and pursue greater faith.

Galatians 6:9 reminds us to "not become weary in doing good." But that can be twisted only to mean "never stop."

When in fact what is needed most to keep you going as a spiritually healthy leader, is to take regular time out to focus on your personal spiritual growth. The very thing you help others experience, you can overlook for yourself.

3) The miraculous starts to become mundane.

When profound life change like salvation, restoring of marriages, or someone breaks free from an addiction, becomes business as usual, that's a warning sign.

When life change seems more like an organizational success rather than a heart-stirring, moving, eternity-changing moment, that's a warning sign.

I've experienced it personally. It's not a good place to be as a spiritual leader. If it's short-lived, it's pretty natural and normal, but if allowed to persist it's a bigger deal.

Every time I watch a baptism, there is a certain awe and wonder that is directly connected to the

mystery of the gospel. Skill and systems are necessary, but we can never let them trump the majesty and power of God.

All of these things are part of the deeper process and the larger context of personal discipleship and spiritual growth for the pastor.

5 practical questions to help keep your personal spiritual vitality alive and well:

1. What was the last thing God said to you and when?
2. Are you quick to follow the everyday prompts of the Holy Spirit?
3. What “spiritual life” book you are currently reading that is not part of your teaching preparation?
4. Are you in community with a few believers where you are known intimately, and you can be challenged and encouraged in your faith?
5. Is your prayer life all that you want it to be right now? If not, what is preventing it from becoming all that you want it to be?

I pray this post is of great encouragement to you.

> [Read more from Dan.](#)
