

Perils of Ministry

My wife and I enjoyed a recent e-mail from one of our daughters who is married to a terrific pastor. She told us that her husband was fulfilling his pastoral responsibilities several weeks ago by picking up a trusted church member and visiting some people who had been attending church rather sporadically. They stopped at Jim's house first (name has been changed) because they hadn't seen him in church for several weeks. Jim had a good excuse. His excessive weight had contributed to a leg sore that was infected, open, and oozing. Our son-in-law felt sorry for Jim and offered to lay hands on him and pray. As he prepared to offer the prayer, this young, caring minister made a serious error in judgment. He asked to see the wound.

It's important to understand that the pastor who married our daughter is one of the greatest guys in the world. He is so kind and good to our daughter and is a terrific father to three of our grandchildren. Yet, this energetic and passionate pastor has an incredibly weak stomach. He gags at anything gross and can't stand the sight of blood. He can barely even change some of the diapers that are soiled by his young children. Why he requested to see the wound is still a mystery to those of us who know him.

Jim lifted his pant leg and revealed a nasty red and oozing sore. Immediately our son-in-law began to gag. He fought to control himself and then gagged again. With all the strength he could muster, he looked away and overcame the gag reflex. Laying his hand on the rolled up pant leg, he began to pray. As he prayed, he realized his hand was getting wet. He cracked one eye open for just a moment and realized that he was touching the part of the pant leg that was soaking up the oozing, infected fluid. Horrified, he began to gag again. Fearing he may vomit at any moment, he lifted his hand and quickly finished the prayer. I have an idea that angels were rolling with laughter on Heaven's floor.

With an ashen face and weak knees, our son-in-law finally made it home. As he told the story to our daughter, he began to gag again. His sympathetic wife listened incredulously and then laughed until tears rolled down her cheeks. She assured him that she had never heard a story quite that funny. Unable to contain herself, she sat at her computer the next morning and related the story to the rest of the family. Our red-faced son-in-law insisted on proof-

reading the letter to determine its accuracy but halfway through the letter he began to gag again and couldn't finish reading the communication.

We love to tease this dear member of our family and he's a terrific sport. Yet, I find myself sobered by the enormity of his calling. I'm thankful I don't have his responsibilities. I'm not sure I could muster up the courage to do the things he's called to do. The expectations placed upon him are overwhelming and the tasks are formidable.

His congregation holds him responsible to foster an environment of worship each Sunday morning and they want it to be meaningful to both young and old. On top of that, they expect him to effectively and passionately interpret and teach the Holy Scriptures every time he preaches.

They also expect that he and his family participate in nearly all the activities sponsored by the congregation. Then they ask him to help hold all of them accountable as they interact with the community during the week. They also expect him to be an example of Christian living in every thing he does and they carefully monitor all of his activities. They want him to comfort them when they are hurting and visit them when they are sick. They expect him to counsel them through difficult times and they look to him to assist with the healing of broken relationships. They ask him to participate in the weddings of their children and he is expected to conduct the funerals of those who pass from this life into the next. As a reward for meeting all of those expectations, he is paid a modest salary that barely keeps him and his family above poverty level. I don't know how he does it.

I've noticed though, that despite the difficulties and perils, he loves what he does. He tells me that the rewards of his work are amazing. The church is growing and he is loved by those he serves. He feels the strong presence of the Holy Spirit leading him and he's thrilled to be in the center of God's will for his life. It's a great spot to be in.

I'm told Jim is still not back at church but his leg is improving. Our son-in-law keeps visiting him. It's what he's called to do. Wisely, he no longer asks to see the wound but has been assured that once the healing is complete Jim will be back in church again. Apparently, those are the kinds of rewards that outweigh the perils of ministry. **BB**

