

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

Having pastored churches for two decades, having spoken to tens of thousands of pastors around the world, and having many pastors as personal friends, I think I can say that I know something about the demands of pastoring a modern church. Like every pastor of an institutional church, I have experienced the "dark side" of the ministry. It can be very dark at times. In fact, "brutal" might be a better word to describe it.

The expectations that most pastors encounter naturally create incredible stresses that sometimes even ruin their relationships within their own families. Pastors are discouraged for many reasons. They must be politicians, judges, employers, psychologists, activity directors, building contractors, marriage counselors, public speakers, managers, mind readers and administrators. They often find themselves in fierce competition with other pastors to gain a larger slice of the body of Christ. They have little time for personal spiritual disciplines. Many feel trapped in their vocation and are underpaid. Their congregations are their customers and their employers. Sometimes those employers and customers can make life very difficult.

By comparison, the house church pastor has it easy. First, if he leads an exemplary life of a true disciple and teaches uncompromised obedience to Jesus' commandments, few goats will have an interest in being part of his group. In fact, just meeting in houses is probably enough to keep many goats away. So he'll mostly have sheep to pastor.

Second, he can love and disciple all his sheep on a personal basis, because he only has twelve to twenty adults to oversee. He can enjoy real closeness with them, as he is like the father of a family. He can give them the time they deserve. I remember when I was an institutional pastor, I often felt alone. I couldn't get close with anyone with my congregation, lest others resent me for not including them in my close circle of friends or become jealous of those within that circle. I longed for genuine closeness with other believers, but wouldn't risk the potential price of gaining true friends.

In the close-knit family of a house church, the members naturally help keep the pastor accountable, as he is their close friend, not an actor on a stage.

The house church pastor can spend time developing leaders of future house churches, so when the time comes to multiply, leaders are ready. He doesn't have to watch his most promising future leaders take their gifts from the church to a Bible school in another place.

He may well have time to develop other ministry outside his local congregation. Perhaps he could minister in prisons, personal care homes or be involved in one-on-one evangelism to refugees or businesspeople. Depending on his experience, he could conceivably devote some of his time to planting other house churches, or mentoring younger house church pastors who have been raised up under his ministry.

He feels no pressure to be a Sunday-morning performer. He never needs to prepare a three-point sermon on a Saturday night, wondering how he can possibly satisfy so many people who are at so many different levels of spiritual growth.<sup>[1]</sup> He can delight in watching the Holy Spirit use everyone at the gatherings and encourage them to use their gifts. He can be absent from meetings and everything works well even without him.

He has no building to distract him and no employees to manage.

He has no reason to compete with other local pastors.

There is no "church board" that exists to make his life miserable and through which political infighting becomes common.

In short, he can be what he is called to be by God, and not what is imposed on him by cultural Christianity. He is not the lead actor, the president of a company, or the center of the hub. He is a disciple maker, an equipper of the saints.

[1] Many pastors never become good orators, even though they are God-called, caring servants of Christ. In fact, is it being too harsh to say that many sermons by pastors are boring, or at least boring at times? What one church-critic refers to as "the thousand-yard stare" is very common among the pew sitters. But those same pastors who are boring orators are often very good conversationalists, and people rarely become bored while

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they are engaged in conversation with one another. That is why the interactive teaching at house churches is usually always interesting. Time flies during such times, as contrasted with the many covert glances at wristwatches during church sermons. House church pastors don't have to worry about being boring.