

Moody Radio Commentary – Dr. John Koessler

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Title: It's Hard Being a Pastor – Part 1 of 2

Tease: Do you know what struggles your pastor might face? Dr. John Koessler shares some of his thoughts, next...

Lead: Pastors have a very unique job and set of responsibilities. And, most church goers aren't aware of these duties. But former pastor, Dr. John Koessler has first-hand experience. Next on this week's Moody Radio Commentary he shares why it's hard to be a pastor...

In Cue: "When I was in seminary..."

Out Cue: "... For Moody Radio, this is John Koessler."

When I was in seminary, one of my professors told our class a cautionary tale about a student who explained his rationale for entering the ministry in these words: "It's easier than digging ditches." The unworthiness of such a motive is so obvious it needs no comment. What is worth noting is the falsity of that student's assumption. In his book *Pastoral Theology* Alexandre Vinet identifies "much labor" not only as one of the pastor's primary difficulties but as one of his obligations: "The smallest parish should become, by the zeal of him who cultivates it, as onerous as the largest; this work has no limit, no spot where the material fails."

It is the breadth of the pastor's duties that often makes it difficult. Most pastors do not enjoy the luxury of being specialists. They visit the sick, teach the youth, share the gospel, and prepare sermons on a weekly basis. Add to this the responsibilities of leadership and it is easy to see why we feel so tired. At the same time, the bulk of this work goes unobserved. Pastors do not punch a clock. They do not have a supervisor. True, the expectations of the congregation may make them feel as if they have a hundred employers. But in reality most church members trust the pastor to do his job. The broad nature of the pastor's responsibilities combined with the relative freedom given to them to execute their duties without someone looking over their shoulder can lead to two dangerous temptations.

The first is the temptation to exaggerate. Because we are aware that most of what we do is hidden from view, we overstate the nature of our work. This is not peculiar to the pastor. I have found that it is a temptation in academia as well. This tendency may be due to pride or it may be the result of a misguided attempt to reassure others that we are "earning our pay." Whatever the reason, it causes us to put on airs like the hypocrites of Jesus' day, who looked somber and

disfigured their faces to show others that they were fasting (Matthew 6:16). It prompts us to carry out our duties with drooping shoulders and long sighs and to claim that we are doing more than is actually the case.

The other great temptation is to be lazy. Congregational ignorance over the nature of a pastor's duties combined with the absence of direct oversight can be a toxic combination when they come into contact with a pastor's self-pity or self-interest. There are arguably few professions besides the pastor's where it is so easy to look so busy and do so little. It may anger some to hear me say such a thing. Pastoral ministry is one of those callings where public opinion runs to extremes. Either we have nothing good to say about the pastor or we feel that the pastor is beyond all criticism and that no one should dare to lift a finger against God's anointed-or at least that they should not speak a word against him.

The truth here, as in most things, is somewhere in the middle. The pastor's vocation is hard work but there are probably people in the congregation who work harder. Most pastors I know have a good work ethic, are devoted to their calling and are more than willing to shoulder the load assigned to them. But they are not beyond criticism. Like the rest of us, there is probably always room for improvement. No doubt we would all benefit from taking heed to Paul's words in "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." 2 Timothy 4:5. That's my opinion. For Moody Radio, this is John Koessler.