JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

HELP! THE PREACHERS ARE FALLING

Four Steps to Protect Your Faith When a Pastor Fails

> Preachers will fail, but Jesus never does. Get clear, get ready, get mature and get yours, so that your faith rests on Jesus alone and the teaching that took root in you stays yours when a teacher falls.

MAIN TEXT
1 Corinthians 1:11-13

SERIES
Stand-alone message

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BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Church hurt has no textbook definition, so it needs a spectrum. On one end is disappointment, in the middle is real hurt, and on the other end is genuine abuse. Not every situation carries the same weight.
2. The damage runs both ways. People who treat disappointment as hurt become unreasonable, and people who downgrade abuse to hurt leave something unresolved that torments them for decades.
3. Church leaders typically fail for three reasons. Pastors are not trained as financial people, legal people or counselors, and most of what they end up doing is accounting, legal work and counseling.
4. One: get clear. Ministers times church does not equal Jesus. Was Paul crucified for you is the clarity question, and preachers are servants through whom you believed, not the one who died for you.
5. Two: get ready. Paul says he came in weakness so that your faith would not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Getting ready means relocating your faith from men to God before anything happens.
6. Your attack surface is every point at which your faith can be hit. Most believers have faith resting on the church, the denomination, the local assembly, the pastor, the services, the ministries, leaders, team, members and attendees, so almost anything can take them out. The ideal attack surface is Jesus alone, and Jesus does not fail.
7. Three: get mature. Paul says that among the mature they do impart wisdom, and that the Spirit reveals the things freely given by God. That is why cross centered preaching is enough for a mature believer: the Holy Spirit does the work in the room.
8. Preaching anything other than the cross enlarges the attack surface, because behavior teaching makes the preacher the proof that the teaching works. When he falls, the teaching falls with him.
9. A preacher is not the proof of the scripture. The Lord told him he was not called to be perfect, he was called to preach the word.
10. Four: get yours. Teachers build on the one foundation with gold, silver and precious stones or with wood, hay and stubble, and fire tests which is which. Sound teaching survives, and whatever revelation actually caught fire in you is yours from that point on, independent of whoever taught it.

11. On the pain itself: you will most likely never get the apology or see the person pay. The choice is to keep looking at it or to do the work. Disappointment you get over, hurt you get through, and abuse requires real help from someone trained for it.

WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/19FHEGnayPE

READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/help-the-preachers-are-falling

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

These notes were built from the transcript of the message. There were no original preaching notes.

This message followed "The Spirit of Doeg," which promised it: the real issue is not the preacher who falls but what the hearer allows to compromise their trust in the Word. It was preached on Mother's Day, from the floor, with a graphic of the spectrum of church hurt and a graphic of the attack surface on the screen. Both graphics are worth rebuilding if you preach it.

Three cautions. First, say clearly that this is not a defense of every preacher who has fallen. Abuse must be dealt with, swiftly and openly. Second, the closing section speaks directly to people who have been hurt or abused. Keep its tone pastoral, and point people who have been abused to trained help. Third, the message names no fallen public figures; keep it that way.

Introduction

If you have been online in the last year, you have probably seen it: another preacher, another fall, another wave of stories about pain connected to the local church. We even have a phrase for it: church hurt.

Inevitably a preacher is going to fail you. It may not be catastrophic, but to some degree, your pastor will let you down. Somebody will. And one day you will turn on the news and see a preacher fall that you never saw coming. Today you will walk away with tools that protect you from the fallout.

The Spectrum of Church Hurt

There is no textbook definition of church hurt. A coined phrase means whatever the person saying it thinks it means. So picture a spectrum. Not every situation carries the same weight.

- **Disappointment** sits on the low end.
- **Hurt** sits in the middle.
- **Abuse** sits on the far end.

Illustration: "You'll never lead worship for me." Growing up, I felt called to be a worship leader. My youth pastor looked at me in the foyer, in front of people, and said, "You'll never lead worship for me." It was not egregious, but it stung, and it left a bruise that is still with me. That is hurt.

Illustration: the voicemails after the cruise. A pastor friend came home from a cruise, years before you could stay connected at sea, to a string of voicemails. Sarah Beth is going to the ER. She is being

admitted. She has been moved to the ICU. It might be time to come pray with the family. Then: Sarah Beth died. For him, she went from the ER to gone in thirty seconds. It is easy for a family to carry that offense, but it is really disappointment. You cannot expect a pastor to know what is happening by telepathy and teleport off the ship.

Abuse is a big deal. Child abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse must be dealt with swiftly and openly. Nobody should be able to say twenty years later, "We told the pastor and he never did anything." The line between hurt and abuse can be fuzzy, and someone who grew up in a rough household may not recognize abuse for what it is.

Mixing up the categories causes real damage:

- **People who treat disappointment as hurt become unreasonable.** If someone throws away your Cheerios and you respond as if they cussed you out on your front porch, no amount of Cheerios will ever make it right.
- **People who treat abuse as mere hurt downgrade what they have been through.** It stays unresolved, sometimes for twenty years, and they carry pain and torment without knowing what to do with it.
- **People who treat disappointment or hurt as abuse** can spend years and an entire social media following trying to ruin someone's life over being asked to wrap the microphone cables one too many times.

Knowing where you are on the spectrum matters for your own healing. The goal is not justice; a pastor cannot deliver that. The hope is that you get better, find healing and hope, and move forward.

WHY CHURCH LEADERS FAIL

Often it comes down to training. Pastors are not trained to be financial people, legal people or counselors, and much of what pastors end up doing is accounting, legal work and counseling. That is not an excuse for anyone. It is a reality worth understanding.

The best way to not get hurt is to not get hurt. The next best thing is to get better when you get hurt. So here are four tools.

1. Get Clear

> **1 CORINTHIANS 1:11-13** ESV
>
> 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

"Was Paul crucified for you?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). That is the clarity question.

People say, “It was the people, not the church,” or “It was the church, not Jesus.” That is easier to type in a comment than to realize. To many people, the pastor is the representation of Jesus. They do not see past him to the cross. A pastor should work against that every week, but it is the reality.

Get clear on who Jesus is. It is not your pastor, not this church, not a denominational figure, not even Billy Graham. Jesus Christ is the one who died for you. You need help because the preachers are falling, but you need no help when it comes to Jesus. He never fails.

The equation: Ministers times Church does not equal Jesus.

Paul says the leaders are servants: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Illustration: the First Priority list. In high school I never went to First Priority, the Christian student group, though the yearbook put my picture on its page every year. My senior year, the group made a list of people to pray for, and it got out in about thirteen seconds. A girl on the basketball team screamed in my face in English class because she thought I was part of it. She confused a bystander with the whole thing. You cannot confuse a servant with the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Get Ready

> **1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5** ESV
>
> [1] And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul was a scholar with plenty to talk about, yet he wrote, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). That is cross-centered preaching: the finished work of Jesus Christ. And he did it “so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Simplified: so that your faith might not rest in men, but in God. Getting ready means moving your faith out of people and into the Lord before anything happens.

THE ATTACK SURFACE

Cybersecurity uses a phrase called the attack surface: the breadth of vulnerability a system has, every point where something could hit it and cause it to fail.

There is an attack surface for the Christian. **The typical Christian attack surface** looks like this:

- Jesus
- the church

- the denomination
- the local assembly
- the pastor
- the services
- the ministries
- leaders
- the team
- members
- attendees

Most people's faith is built on a lot of that list. People leave churches all the time because one person got disgruntled, which shows their faith rested partly on that person's satisfaction. With an attack surface that broad, almost anything can take you out.

The ideal Christian attack surface is Jesus. If Jesus fails, your faith fails. That is good news, because Jesus does not fail.

Minimize your attack surface. The more your faith relies on anything other than Jesus Christ, the more vulnerable you are. A believer who spends time in the Word and prayer every day can watch a preacher fall without being knocked down.

3. Get Mature

Have the congregation look at a neighbor and say, "Grow up."

> **1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-12** ESV
>
> 6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers
> of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which
> God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they
> had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor
> ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— 10 these
> things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths
> of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also
> no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the
> spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us
> by God.

"Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:6). Paul has just said he preaches only Christ crucified. He does not say he preaches anything else to the mature. So it stands to reason: **for spiritually mature people, preaching the cross is enough.**

Why? “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:10). We have received the Spirit “that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Did it cost you anything for Jesus to die for you? Can you buy or work your way to what His death provides? No. Everything that comes from the finished work of the cross is freely given, and the Holy Spirit shows you those things. A mature believer can hear the finished work preached and walk out with revelation, insight and wisdom that were never spoken from the pulpit.

Not everyone welcomes that. Some want five ways to be a better employee or a better friend. A preacher can choose to keep preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Preaching anything other than the cross increases the attack surface. When preachers mostly teach behavior (do this, act this way), the preacher becomes the authority and the proof that the teaching works. When he falls in that area, or any area, people conclude, “If he didn’t do it, maybe I’m not supposed to either.”

Illustration: “I guess I cannot preach on adultery anymore.” A pastor who had an affair told the woman involved, “Well, I guess I cannot preach on adultery anymore.” Many preachers think the same way about simpler things they have not mastered: “I can’t talk about it because I haven’t done it.”

But the Lord spoke to me years ago: **”I have not called you to be perfect. I’ve called you to preach the word.”** The preacher is never the proof of the Scripture. The Scripture speaks for itself, and God honors His Word.

4. Get Yours

Paul writes, “For all things are yours” (1 Corinthians 3:21).

> **1 CORINTHIANS 3:22** ESV
>
> 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,

Paul, Apollos and Cephas, your teachers, belong to you, not the other way around.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-11** ESV
>
> 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- **Teachers are servants.** They are the ones “through whom you believed” (1 Corinthians 3:5).

- **God gives the growth.** "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Preachers participate in the process, but God does the work.
- **Watch the metaphor change.** "You are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Paul moves from planting to building, and the builders are the teachers.
- **There is one foundation.** "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). That is Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Teachers will build other things on that foundation. Sometimes a teacher has specialty revelation from God, a subject where God has shown him what works. And sometimes hearers are not mature enough for the cross alone; if you are flipping people the bird in the parking lot after church, we need to talk about behavior.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15** ESV
>
> [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—[13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Read this in context. Paul is describing good teachers here (Apollos and Cephas), not false prophets, and the fire is the testing every life goes through. Every house in this room will face a fire at some point.

- **Gold, silver, precious stones:** teaching that is timeless, sturdy and weighty, that makes it through anything.
- **Wood, hay, stubble:** teaching that may be good for right now, but will not survive the fire. Some teaching does not even take a fire; a spark or a minor inconvenience unravels it, and reading three more verses would have shown it did not work that way.
- **The reward** is that the teaching worked. **The loss** is living with the results of a teaching that did not hold up. It is not about heaven or hell; the builder "will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Illustration: wood framing. Coming from Florida, where houses are built of concrete block and stucco, it is surprising to see houses framed in wood. Wood frames a fine house, but in a fire it will not last.

A mature believer can bear up under more false teaching than the average person, taking things under advisement. An immature believer will be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

Here is why it matters. You have been taught how to be faithful, pray, read the Bible, serve people, love one another, be faithful to your spouse, raise your children, serve the Lord with gladness, give and receive. If a preacher falls, that teaching is not contingent on his survival. **Once a revelation jumps from one person into another and starts to burn, it is yours from that point on.**

Conclusion

Speak plainly and pastorally to anyone carrying pain.

Some in the room have been through the most egregious things. (As preached, this section included painful details from Pastor Jason's own childhood, offered as "I'm with you." Use your own judgment about what to share.)

You have a choice. You can wait to see the person pay the price, which almost never happens. This is not saying it was okay. It is reality. **You will probably never get the apology. The person will probably never know what they did wrong. If they knew better, they would have done better.** Scripture says a fool's "folly will not depart from him" (Proverbs 27:22). They may never pay, never apologize, never get what they deserve. You can look at it for the rest of your life, or you can do the work to move forward.

That is not "get over it" or "suck it up." Some people need counseling three times a week, and that is what it takes.

Illustration: "Life's hard. Then you die." A fifth-grade teacher said it every day. Adjust it this much: life is hard, but take heart. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Be prepared. The preachers are falling. People will mess up. You will be disappointed, and you may be hurt. Follow these steps: get clear, get ready, get mature and get yours. Store up the teaching you have been given as your own, and when it happens, you will survive that moment.

Pastoral encouragement:

- **If you are disappointed, get over it.** It has been five years since they threw your Nutri-Grain bars away. Let it go.
- **If you have been hurt, get through it.** It may still be with you, even haunt you, but press on.
- **If you have been abused, get help.** You cannot do it alone. A pastor is not trained for this. Go talk to a counselor who is.

Close with a hand clap of praise for the Lord, who never fails.



ABOUT

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Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

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