

# When Pastors Doubt Their Leadership Ability

*by Thom S. Rainer*

It is a key issue in pastoral leadership today.

Here is a quote from a pastor I coach. It is indicative of this issue: “I don’t feel like I am leading well. Sometimes I wonder if God’s anointing and calling is no longer on my life.”

That pastor is not alone. As I work with these pastors, I hear similar themes. What is taking place? Why are doubts creeping into their minds and hearts? Though I am certainly not all-knowing, I do see five key reasons for the doubts. Let’s look at each of them.

1. Attendance is declining or growing too slowly. While this concern was present before the pandemic, it has been pervasive since 2020. While some may argue that we shouldn’t focus on numbers, we must focus on obedience to the Great Commission. Most often that obedience results in numerical growth. The reality, however, is that growth is more difficult than it ever has been in our lifetimes. Cultural Christianity is all but gone. Transfer growth is minimal. It is indeed a new world for churches and her leaders.

2. It is increasingly difficult to get committed volunteers. Most pastors feel this pain point deeply. Commitment levels are waning. One of the issues that exacerbates this problem is the failure of many churches to reduce their activities and programs that make a meaningful difference. Churches should not expect members to volunteer for programs and committees that really have no meaningful purpose.

3. Pastors are wearier than they've ever been. Many pastors interpret this post-pandemic weariness to be a sign that they are no longer effective in their ministry. Others feel like the weariness is an indicator of a waning call. Neither are necessarily true. The reality is that the pandemic and its aftermath created angst and, often, depression. It's more normal than most pastors realize.

4. The critics are louder and more frequent. I have overwhelming anecdotal evidence that this reality is a clear and present pain point for church leaders, particularly pastors. Keep in mind that the weariness and, perhaps, depression, many pastors feel is also felt by church members. They too are hurting. And pastors are often a convenient target to direct their anger.

5. Church giving is declining. This reason has many of the same roots as declining attendance. But declining giving likely has many immediate consequences. Ministries are cut. Personnel are let go or moved to part time. Mission giving by the church declines. And, in many cases, pastors themselves must take pay cuts or move to bivocational status.

These issues are real and present. The pain is undeniable.

It is time for major leadership adjustments among pastors. These changes are not a sign of poor leadership; they are signs of needed leadership changes. Even Moses had to change his leadership approach in the wilderness. For that, we are ever thankful for his father-in-law, Jethro.