

Four Temptations I'm Still Fighting Against After Forty Years as a Christian Leader

Sometimes, late at night, pastors and Christian leaders struggle with vital, soul-searching questions: What have I done with all these years? What people have come & gone from my life? What have been my successes, and what have been my failures? What have I learned about myself and what have I learned about God? Has the struggle and pain been worth it?

Jay Mosser has served in pastoral roles for nearly 40 years – about 20 years in various assistant pastor capacities and the rest as senior pastor. Through those years he has served in three churches ranging from smaller (less than 50) to larger (about 1,000). Along the way he has worked with children, teens, worship ministry, pastoral care, preaching and leadership. Jay has an M.Div from Western (Conservative Baptist) Seminary and a D.Min from Corban University in Oregon, where his doctoral thesis was titled “How a Pastor’s Theology of Shepherding Affects the Health & Growth of a Church.” He is married to Kathy and has three daughters and three grandchildren. In his spare time, he loves to read, hike, travel, watch sports, and spend time with his family.

Gospel ministry is amazing and wonderful and full of surprises. At the very same time, it is difficult and heart-wrenching and bathed in tears. It is an amazing privilege to serve the King of kings and doing so – especially for the long haul – brings special joys and profound burdens.

This coming calendar year – 2021 – will be a year with significant milestones for my wife and for me. In April, the local church we serve will celebrate its fiftieth year. We’re not sure what kind of a party we’ll have, but there will be a party! Next year as well I will turn 60 years old, we will mark 40 years in continuous pastoral ministry, and we will celebrate 20 years in our current ministry. These are times to celebrate and times to reflect. So, what have we learned? What have I learned?

II Corinthians 4 is one of my favorite chapters in the entire Bible. I have numerous “favorite chapters,” but when I think about long-term Gospel ministry, this chapter speaks to me deeply. Paul is contrasting Old Covenant ministry and New Covenant ministry, and as he comes to chapter 4, he is giving us reasons NOT to lose heart.

This text corresponds with Four Temptations I Am Still Fighting Against:

I. I Am Tempted to Forget How Weak I Am (“earthen vessels” or “clay pots”)

A. II Corinthians 3:5-6

Not only are there things I am not very good at, but even in my areas of strength, I am utterly powerless to change the hearts of anyone. This is a truly humbling realization.

B. II Corinthians 12:10

In the context, why is Paul weak? Because he has been pleading with the Lord to remove the “thorn in the flesh,” and God has told him no...three times. He has been wrestling with God about difficult things that God has allowed in his life.

C. Hebrews 11:34

The Old Testament saints in this paragraph faced human weakness, sinful weakness, success, failure, and “out of weakness were made strong.”

(A word of advice: Don't allow times of special weakness or inadequacy to ruin your ministry; run to Christ because any adequacy you'll ever have will be in Him. And let's face it: if we're only going to serve Christ when we're “adequate,” we won't be doing ministry very long!)

II. I Am Tempted to Forget How Real the Spiritual Battle Truly Is

A. II Corinthians 4:4 “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers”

B. What does this mean for Gospel ministry?

It means that even my best sermons and carefully crafted apologetic arguments and wise counsel cannot – alone – open blind eyes. I need God Himself to open blind eyes and humble proud hearts. It means that prayer is a bigger part of my weekly work than I realize.

III. I Am Tempted to Forget That the Gospel Ministry Is Indeed Glorious!

A. Look at the words used: “this ministry...our gospel...the gospel of the glory of Christ...we preach Christ...the light of the knowledge of the glory of God...this treasure...”

B. A letter I think you should read...

IV. I Am Tempted to Forget How Short Life Is

A. READ again II Corinthians 4:13-18

B. Personal reflections

1. From a war-torn country
2. From the loss of yet another friend

Taking it Home: Let's TALK!

- Where are you at in fighting against these “Four Temptations”?
- What circumstances has God used most recently to shape your heart in these areas?
- Is there one of these temptations that you're struggling with right now?
- In which of these areas might you need prayer the most today?