

## PLASTIC PASTORS

Plastic pastors have descended upon the church like a plague of frogs- plastic frogs or perhaps Ken dolls. A plastic pastor is a pastor who is false but not to the degree that he is a raging wolf in sheep's clothing. Instead, he is false like a picture of the ocean is compared to actually being at the beach- with the wind blowing in your hair, the sun warming your face and the waves washing the sand off your toes. A plastic pastor is empty and hollow. He is neither wolf nor true shepherd, but a hireling. He is someone who has a look of being real but is not. They are the veggie burgers of the preaching world.

Let me give you six ways to spot a plastic pastor – either in the mirror or the pulpit.

### PLASTIC PASTORS CRAFT AN IMAGE

Let me clue you in. How a pastor dresses is deliberate. You should know this about him whether he is wearing an Armani suit or some hip kicks and a cool leather jacket. Or on the other hand if he is dressing to *not* be particularly noticed. On the one hand he is deliberately crafting an image and *wants* people to notice. On the other hand, he is deliberately seeking to dress in such a way that will not draw attention to himself. The man of God wants to be neither cool nor awkwardly out of touch with his people. That is, he does not dress like a refugee from youth ministry, nor does he wear a white suit with white leather shoes. He is neither a punk pastor, a metro sexual, or a cover model for GQ magazine, nor does he wear two kinds of plaid.

He dresses like a grown man- a man who is deadly serious about the calling of preaching. He dresses not to get noticed as cool or stylish, but to get out of the way of the text. This does not demand suit and tie, but it means a manner of dress that communicates he is serious about the task and cares not about whether you notice his sweet new tat or his cool retro Converse, or his faux hawked hair. Those who do care are plastic pastors.

### PLASTIC PASTORS RELY ON POWERPOINT AND VIDEO

I know, I know, put your hands down. There are pastors who might not be fully plastic who use PowerPoint in the pulpit. There are some men who have taken this up who are otherwise relatively sound and I want to acknowledge that. But let me plead with you that if you are one of those - lose the PowerPoint.

PowerPoint and video in the pulpit are like ketchup on a beautiful ribeye steak (medium rare). Totally unnecessary and it ruins the steak. The Word does not need our help to spice it up or make it more appealing to our people. To paraphrase Spurgeon, we just need to let it out like a lion out of a cage. Just get out of the way. Preach knowing that the Word of God is raw power. It created the heavens and the earth and so it does not need our cleverness or our tech savvy to help it. Just herald it before your people. No past great preachers of the Word needed PowerPoint to improve their preaching. Consider even the best men of our day and I cannot think of a one who would do better with pictures on a screen.

Pastors pull the plug on your PowerPoint and video clips of Avenger movies. These may be helpful in other teaching settings but used in the pulpit they only reveal your lack of seriousness and your lack of confidence in the Word preached. It also keeps your people at a junior high level in their spiritual growth and it keeps you and your people tethered to a screen so that you cannot be fully tethered to the text. PowerPoint and video make for plastic pastors.

## PLASTIC PASTORS PREACH ON STAGES WITH WELL-CRAFTED SETS

Do you want to know if your pastor is a plastic pastor? Does he preach with a set behind him? Is there a carefully designed backdrop to match his current series on Dynamic Friendships or Maximum Marriage or Power Parenting or whatever trendy title there might be? Is everything crafted to have the feel of a production rather than simply like that of a man lighting the fuse of the fireworks. He should be there to get things going and get out of the way.

Pastors lose the sets. Lose the special lighting. Just find a place to preach from so that you can be seen and heard and forget the rest.

I favor pulpits rather than the man simply standing up and pacing the “stage”. And not plexiglass ones designed to signal transparency or “authenticity”. But simple wooden ones which point to a sacredness and a simplicity to the task at hand. Now there are no texts of Scripture that call for a pulpit and no preacher in the Bible preached from one. A pulpit is not required to preach the Word. But in our culture we have ways to signal what is happening up front. The President stands behind a podium with the seal of the president of the United States on the front. It is to signal authority. He does not pace the stage when he delivers the state of the union speech.

Pastors would do well to preach in such a way that signals simple authority. In the days of the New Testament teachers would signal their authority by sitting. But this is not something we recognize in our day.

Pulpits help keep us from being plastic men. They help ground us to the task at hand.

## PLASTIC PASTORS ARE PRAGMATISTS

A pragmatist is someone who believes that the most pressing need for people is to tell them what to do. Pragmatists give their people a system for making life work in 5 steps. Just tell them how to be a good friend or a good husband or a good parent or a good worker or a happy person and send them out the door. Pragmatism is only interested in making the patient feel better about life and being successful. In the end this is an appeal to the sinful heart. The sinful heart does not want to be *Coram Deo*- before the face of God. No, the sinful hearts of men just want some tips to get along in life. They do not want tremble before the throne of God. They just want this one “weird trick” to hack their life.

Yes, we must apply the text, but we should know that the text rightly preached will also apply itself. Our goal should not be to boil it all down to 4 simple actions. Oft times we ought to let the Spirit apply the text in how He sees fit in the different hearts of our listeners.

Does the pastor like to boast about being “practical”? Does he apologize for having to preach about some doctrine as though it were unhelpful or at least unpleasant? Do his messages just use the Bible as a way to make life go better? Are they filled with little Bible and a lot of “how to’s”? If yes, then he is a plastic pastor.

## PLASTIC PASTORS ARE SECOND-HANDERS

A second-hander is a term borrowed from Ayn Rand (not one to find much help from). I use it in the sense of someone who fails to labor in the Word on their own, but rather begs, borrows and steals their thoughts and ideas from others. In the worst of cases, we find outright plagiarism. We have witnessed this at stomach churning levels in my own denomination of the Southern Baptist Convention.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haiF0d-8tYk> ; <https://youtu.be/dNmdAroNxnw>).

But you can still be a second-hander if your outlines and illustrations come mostly from others- even if acknowledged as such. You do not have to have “Ed Litton” level plagiarism to be a second-hander. It is natural as a young preacher to borrow much, but it is unnatural as a man who has learned to labor in the Word in season and out of season. We all use the ideas of others, and we must, for none of us are omni-competent and it would be arrogant not to. But we must not be *that guy* who has not labored over the text before he turns to a commentary or a sermon series from another man of God.

The longer we labor in the pulpit the less we ought to feel the need to turn to a commentary or a book of illustrations. Though we ought to continue to be readers and learners.

The text must pierce our own souls and must delight us *firsthand*. If not, we are a second-hander and a plastic pastor.

#### PLASTIC PASTORS ARE PERFORMERS RATHER THAN PREACHERS

We have far too many performers in the pulpit than preachers of the Word. Far too many men who are good at communication but lousy at true proclamation. Plastic pastors can communicate ideas and string words together but cannot herald the Word. This is deceptive because it appears to be one and the same. Many confuse eloquence with accuracy and truth. But Paul faced this same issue in his day and refused to be a “creative communicator” lest the cross of Christ be robbed of its power (I Cor. 1.;17; 2:1-5). Creativity in the pulpit is the stuff of plastic pastors.

Pastors your people do not need you to be innovative. They need you to be plain and simple and sober. This is not an appeal to be boring or dull. The Word preached in the power of the Spirit is never boring. We must be men who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good and who personally know the fear of the Lord. A man who has seen the glory and the power of the King cannot be dull in speaking to others of what he has seen and heard. That man will not be boring any more than a man who survived the storming of Omaha beach would be boring in the stories he would tell. No, that man has seen and heard and felt too much. We must be those men who have seen, heard and felt too much of our God to be dull.

What are you to do then if you find yourself seeing a plastic man in the mirror or if you see a plastic man in the pulpit of your church? If you are that man- pray for grace to be one who preaches in such a way that you are simply relying on the Word preached in the power of the Spirit. Be ruthless and root out some of these things in your preaching ministry. What if your pastor has some or all of these things? Pray for him. It has been said that we often get the preaching that we ask for and that poor preaching is God's curse on His prayerless church. Could it be that your lack of asking is part of the problem in the poor preaching of your church? Ask God to grant your pastor to be one who rests solely on the sufficiency and the authority of the Word. Ask that God might give reformation in the pulpit of the church where you are. Stay where you are and pray that God might be gracious to your pastor and to you.

The time to leave may come, but let it not come without your faithful labors in prayer and even tears for the preaching of the Word.

May God deliver us from plastic pastors and send us men to soberly stand before us as men who have been solemnly charged to preach the Word.