

WHAT
PASTORS
WISH
CHURCH
MEMBERS KNEW

HELPING PEOPLE **UNDERSTAND** AND
APPRECIATE THEIR LEADERS

DENISE GEORGE

WHAT
PASTORS
WISH
CHURCH
MEMBERS
KNEW

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WHAT
PASTORS
WISH
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MEMBERS
KNEW

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS, FEARS, AND
CHALLENGES OF CHURCH LEADERS TODAY

DENISE GEORGE

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What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew

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For . . .

George M. Williams, my maternal grandfather and a
bivocational pastor/evangelist (1900 – 1986)

Robert C. Wyse, my father, also a bivocational pastor
(1927 – 1999)

Timothy George, my husband, a former pastor and
seminary professor and Beeson Divinity School's
founding dean

Christian George, my firstborn and only son, a
seminary graduate, PhD student, and future pastor/
seminary professor

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INTRODUCTION

DEAR CHRISTIAN: A CRISIS IS happening in the pulpits of our churches today. Our pastors are hurting in silence. They are suffering from physical exhaustion, overwhelming stress, painful loneliness, deep emotional scars, spiritual burnout, and disillusionment. They have a lack of money, lack of friends, lack of time, and lack of confidence in their abilities and ministries. These pastors have troubled marriages, hurting children, and strained relationships with their coworkers and even a few of you, their precious flock. They are afraid of being fired, afraid their faith has dried up, and afraid they don't have what it takes to keep our churches alive and thriving.

So, they are leaving us. They are abandoning their pulpits — disappointed, disgusted, and deeply wounded — by the thousands every year.

Why? Because shepherding God's people is hard work! And because pastors are the only ones among us who have no pastor.

To whom does the average pastor reveal his innermost fears? Temptations? Inadequacies? Failures? Personal and spiritual struggles? The answer is no one. Pastors struggle in secret, keeping the hurt within their own hearts for fear of rejection, distorted perceptions of their character, and ultimately the loss of their ministries.

Sometimes the pastor's heart can't hold all the hurt, all the secret pain. It implodes. The frustrated, disappointed pastor resigns his church and leaves his members scratching their heads, wondering why he left so suddenly.

But it's a scenario that need not happen. If Christians can better understand today's pastor and the pressures he faces in his role as

a shepherd, they can reach out with love to support him and his family in practical ways. You, dear church member, can learn to lovingly support your pastor in meaningful ways. Together, a pastor and his flock, with combined strength, can minister as Christ's church to a lost and hurting world.

Throughout the pages of this book, you'll hear the hearts of today's pastors as they tell you — their church members, board members, and volunteers — with candidness and painful honesty, all the things they want you to know, but could never tell you face to face.

But you should know from the start, these responses are often raw and gritty, starkly realistic, and uncomfortably honest. Their revelations may shock and concern you, but know this: How the average church member perceives his or her pastor is, more often than not, a far cry from the reality of what today's church pastor actually feels, believes, and experiences.

With this book, pastors have been given a rare opportunity to speak openly and anonymously about the concerns and challenges of being a church pastor in today's society — and they have seized it! As in my previous book, *What Women Wish Pastors Knew*, I'm merely the messenger or the reporter, if you will. The real voice is theirs.

A PULPIT, BUT NOT A VOICE

At the annual National Pastors Convention in San Diego, California, in February 2007, I had the opportunity to speak personally to hundreds of pastors through a seminar based on *What Women Wish Pastors Knew*. The insights and information I shared there astonished most of the pastors.

They stayed long past the sessions to dialogue with me about the women in their churches, and every time pastors asked: “Denise, you’ve given a voice to women about what they wish their pastors knew. Would you please write a book about what pastors wish their church members knew?”

So, after much thought and prayer, I knew I wanted to give these pastors the same voice I had given women. I decided to write *What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew*, and when I suggested the idea to my editor, Dr. Paul Engle, his face immediately lit up — a good sign!

I began my research by sending out an informal survey to pastors across the nation, most of whom I had never met; they, in turn, sent it to their pastor-friends. These pastors were asked to respond anonymously to a number of questions: *In your church ministry, what is your greatest joy? Frustration? Disappointment? Fear? What do you wish your church members knew about you, your faith, your family, your finances, your struggles, your hopes, dreams, and expectations?*

I asked them only a few personal questions: age, denomination, church size, marital status, years in ministry, years in their present church, if they were full-time or bivocational pastors, and if they had been seminary trained.

Early in the process, someone told me: “Don’t expect much from the men. Male pastors are reluctant to share their feelings with anyone.” But that person was wrong! Almost immediately after sending out the surveys, the responses began pouring into my office at Beeson Divinity School. Hundreds and hundreds of letters came from pastors around the country. Emails filled my electronic mailbox. Pastors poured out their hearts, telling me their most intimate feelings, their joys, and frustrations — some of which had been bottled and buried for decades.

Many pastors added a personal note of appreciation when they returned their surveys:

“Thank you, Denise.”

“This is a much-needed book!”

It’s about time!”

“Thank you for allowing our church members, church staff, deacons, elders, and denominational heads to hear our hearts and minds!”

THE PASTORS WHO SPOKE

While I invited both male and female senior church pastors to respond to the survey, only a handful of women pastors responded — not surprising considering that only about 2.5 percent of senior church pastors in the United States are women.^{[1](#)} Thus, the voices in this book are predominantly male (and I will generally use masculine pronouns to refer to pastors).

And yet, the diversity of the pastors who responded overwhelmed me. They ranged in age from twenty-five to ninety (and every year between). The number of members in their churches varied from fifteen to twenty thousand (and every number between). I heard from pastors of small churches as well as megachurch pastors, from forty denominations. These pastors had served in ministry from as little as three years to as many as fifty-seven years, and had served in their present churches anywhere from one month to forty-eight years.

Most pastors surveyed were married with children, served full time at their churches, and were seminary trained. One fourth of the pastors surveyed were bivocational, balancing church responsibilities with jobs at hospitals, airports, factories, businesses,

and so on. Although I didn't ask pastors where they lived, postmarks showed that responses arrived from almost every state in the country and even several foreign countries. Some pastors served in rural areas, others in large U.S. cities.

Though these individuals might have had little in common when it came to age, education, years in ministry, and the like, I found they had *everything* in common as active shepherds of church congregations! As I read each survey, I was shocked to discover that almost every pastor shared the same joys and expectations, dealt with the same problems and frustrations, experienced the same concerns about family and finances, and held common goals, hopes, and dreams for his church.

I also discovered that most of the pastors loved their ministries, but had faced almost unbearable hardships, hurts, sorrows, fears, frustrations, and disappointments within the churches they served. And some of their stories broke my heart.

As you might have noticed in my dedication, the four men closest to my heart — my maternal grandfather, my father, my husband, and my son — were or are preachers, pastors, evangelists, present (and future?) seminary professors, and deans. Not only do I come from a background of men who have answered God's call and stepped into pastoral ministry, but, for the past thirty years or more, I've lived in a seminary environment, worked with, counseled, and taught seminary students — future pastors, ministers, and missionaries. Today's church pastor (and pastor-in-training) holds a special place in my heart.

For this reason, my prayer as you read this book is that you will gain a better understanding of, and appreciation for, your pastor — both as a church leader and as a human being. And, in so doing, that you will be better equipped to minister to him as he responds to God's call and ministers to your congregation, community, and world in the name of Jesus Christ.

With my best wishes,
Denise George

SECTION 1: YOUR PASTOR'S PERSONAL LIFE

CHAPTER 1: “I’M NOT SUPERMAN”

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength,
that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

1 Tim othy 1:12

I THOUGHT I KNEW A lot about pastors until I read the hundreds of anonymous surveys returned to me from church leaders across the country. These survey responses revealed pastors’ hearts — openly, candidly, and honestly. Of course, I expected to hear some of the concerns and frustrations confessed, but, I must tell you, some of these pastors surprised me — a few even shocked me.

Perhaps you, like most people, perceive the church pastor to be a strong, almost superhuman spiritual leader — a kind of Spiritual Superman — who has his life and faith and family together. You may believe Spiritual Superman has long ago worked through all his personal and professional problems, and now possesses few, if any, inadequacies, fears, disappointments, or unrealized expectations.

You listen with confidence to his sermons on Sunday mornings. You depend on him to spiritually educate your children. You call on him when you are troubled, depressed, or need advice. When you have a question, you expect him to have the right answer. When you have a crisis, you rush to him for help. When you undergo surgery, you know he’s praying for you in the hospital waiting room.

But how often do you and I purposely look beyond the super spiritual image and see his heart? How often do we realize that he, too, is a vulnerable human being? And, like other human beings, he lives in an imperfect, fallen world and experiences hurts, temptations, struggles, and tragedies in his own life and family?

Throughout the following pages, you'll be able to look deep inside the hearts of today's church pastors to see their unfulfilled yearnings, self-doubts, personal and professional limitations, and human inadequacies. You'll also learn of pastors' fears, disappointments, frustrations, discouragements, and unrealized expectations. You'll see hurt and loneliness and sadness, but you'll also see love, concern, and genuine joy.

For a long time now, theologians, historians, denominational leaders, and others have been telling us the evangelical church in this country is facing a crisis. Church attendance is down; young adults are turned off to the previous generation's beliefs and practices; worship wars are destroying fellowship; secular media is influencing people to laugh at and reject evangelical belief and involvement. We've all heard the comments. We've all seen the throngs of people exiting the church's back door. The church's future can sometimes seem bleak — like a sinking ship already half submerged.

In his new book, *unChristian*, researcher David Kinnaman writes: "One of the surprising insights from our research is that the growing hostility toward Christians is very much a reflection of what outsiders feel they receive from believers. They say their aggression simply matches the oversized opinions and egos of Christians. One outsider put it this way: 'Most people I meet assume that Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, anti-gay, anti-choice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe.' "[1](#)

Kinnaman's words are both sad and alarming. The church is facing a crisis, yes, but there's another crisis brewing — a silent, invisible crisis — and it's happening to the person who stands *in* the pulpit: the church pastor! He needs encouragement, support, and prayer from people who love him and who care about him and the future of the church.

Many of the pastors' comments throughout these pages sound negative, complaining, angry, even hostile. I'm glad they felt free to openly voice their hurts and concerns. But that doesn't describe the hearts of these pastors. Yes, they yearn to be authentic, to bring their hurts and inadequacies to light, but only because they crave their church members' love, respect, prayer, and practical help. The pastors who responded to this survey expressed a deep sacrificial love for their congregations, a dedicated calling into God's ministry, a strong belief in God's Word and the power of prayer, a genuine concern for the salvation of nonbelievers, and a longing to provide good pastoral care. They felt great urgency in the areas of missions and evangelism, but also a huge responsibility to accurately bring God's Word to their members through careful sermon preparation, teaching, and preaching. I found them to be faithful servant leaders with God-given gifts and strengths who experience great joy when a person comes to Christ, immense satisfaction when Christian believers grow in their faith, and sincere gratitude to God when hurting people find spiritual healing through Christ. Pastors are people called to ministry, gifted by God to shepherd a particular flock, and given great hopes and dreams for God's people, the church.

So why must we delve into today's shepherds' unspoken secrets? Why must we risk shattering the pastoral Spiritual Superman image in our effort to be authentic and real?

For one reason: These unspoken secrets can greatly hinder — if not completely destroy — the pastor's God-given potential to minister effectively and fully to his congregation, his community, and his world. We need pastors! They are our captains on this great "ship," and we must learn how to minister to them as they minister to us.

The pastors whose words and lives fill this book are painfully transparent. (According to Kinnaman, transparency simply means admitting what the Bible says about us: we are fallen people who

desperately need God in our lives — every day.²) They open their hearts and lives, allowing you to see their faults, their fears, and their shortcomings. They refuse to pretend they are someone they are not. They reveal their inadequacies. They are authentic.

During the research and writing of this book, a religious person asked me: “Why in the world are you writing this book? If pastors want their church members to know something, why don’t they just come right out and tell them?”

Why? Because most pastors won’t just “come right out and tell them.” The reasons vary, but pastors are human beings, and most people fear rejection if they openly voice their fears and frustrations. Robert S. McGee writes: “When we fear rejection, we find it difficult to open up and reveal our inner thoughts and needs because we believe others will reject us if they know what we’re really like.”³

TELLING ALL

This book might just surprise you. It may even change your perception of the person who stands behind the pulpit. And that’s good news! For if you can really know and understand your pastor, his humanness and his frailties, you can support him and help him accomplish authentic ministry that reaches out in Christ’s name to a fallen and hurting world.

So, as you read the heartfelt responses of pastors around the country — set apart in smaller type throughout the rest of the book — I urge you to pay close attention and reserve judgment long enough to let their words sink deep.

Now then. What *do* pastors wish their church members knew?

Your Pastor Is a Human Being

People often perceive that pastors are perfect, but they aren't — they're human, like the rest of us. Even the apostle Paul and Barnabas had to remind their followers that they too were human.

“Men,” shouted Paul and Barnabas, “why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. . . .” Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. (Acts 14:15, 18)

In the surveys, many pastors wished their church members knew .

. .

I'm human — just one person, with limitations.

I struggle with a strong desire to be perfect, but I never am. I wish my church members knew I had the same doubts, fears, and worries they have. I, too, am trying and working to live by faith.

I'm fallible, imperfect, and human just like everyone else. I have struggles with my family and people I really don't like (although I still love them and care for their eternal and spiritual welfare); and sometimes I get up on the wrong side of the bed!

I'm a person with some of the same fears and desires my church members have. Even though I'm not perfect, I still want to be loved by them. I wish they wouldn't expect perfection from me, and would forgive me when I make mistakes in judgment.

I am not infallible, inexhaustible, or all-knowing. I cannot read the minds of my church members or know intuitively when they need me.

I didn't just fall out of the sky to be their pastor! I'm from somewhere. I have brothers and nieces and nephews and

grandparents, and even though my church family never sees my biological family because of distance, I want them to know I'm human and they exist.

Some pastors also admitted they are, unfortunately, a little more human than they'd like to be.

I have a sense of my own insufficiencies, given the task before me as a pastor in the Lord's church.

I'm often wracked with doubt about my leadership abilities. I'm not as confident as I present myself to be.

I wish my people understood my limitations. I need to be forgiven as I forgive. I need time to be me.

Your Pastor Has Human Problems

As members of the human race, pastors also experience the personal problems that surface in all of us. In fact, for reasons unknown, God often *allows* those in his service to deal with problems and pain and pressures, and the apostle Paul is a good example of this fact.

Scripture tells us Paul had a "thorn" in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7 – 10). Whatever it was, it slowed him down, caused him discomfort, and limited his work for God. But Paul readily admitted his "thorny" problem. He surmised that his thorn kept him dependent on God and not on himself. I'm sure the thorn served other purposes too. No doubt, it kept Paul humble, allowed his followers to see him as a human being with needs and personal concerns, and gave him a sense of greater compassion for others who experienced pain. God comforted Paul in his pain, and Paul comforted others in their pain (2 Corinthians 1:4).

The surveyed pastors also confessed their personal, and often painful, problems.

I, too, have problems. It seems my congregation thinks I'm bullet proof and have no problems. I wish they realized that even though I'm called of God and serving them, I have frustrations. Often their expectations are too unreal for a human to fulfill. I am only one person seeking to do what they seem to expect ten men to do. They want me to be a counselor, chaplain, preacher, financial wizard, prophet, mediator, marriage expert, part-time lawyer, Bible professor, and more. I just can't do it all!

I'm a human being just like other people. My calling is different, but we're all the same before God. I, too, need help — from God and from my church members. I get angry and disappointed and hurt the same as they do. Our church is only as good as we are together.

I'm just a regular guy who has the call of God on his life to be a pastor. I have the same struggles, fears, frustrations, and expectations they have. I'm not perfect.

I'm human, and I have the same temptations and trials they do. Finances, family, frustrations, insecurity, marital problems — all these things make me terribly human.

People think preachers are 'walking Bibles' and should have a great memory. But as I grow older, I have to actually read and study more to be prepared to feed the people of God on a weekly basis.

Pastors also revealed some of their hidden limitations, and their people's perceived expectations of them.

There is a sense that the pastor has to be all things to all people, and quite often I attempt to be just that. But, when faced

with some of the significant challenges ministry brings my way, I very quickly realize my limitations. I don't have all the answers.

Please don't try to force me into roles and into doing things I'm not gifted or called to do. I can't be everything to everyone. Preachers can't live up to everyone's expectations. They aren't perfect and never will be. Many people say they believe those things, until their expectations rub up against who their pastor really is. Preachers cry too, they hurt just like everyone else — preachers are no different from everyone else except for how they work out their call.

I feel inadequate to do anything well because I'm expected to do so many different things.

These personal limitations often make pastors feel responsible when their churches fail to grow numerically or members have failed to grow spiritually. They wrote:

I need ongoing training opportunities to keep up with the changing times and the changing needs and expectations of the church.

I worry about not being the example I need to be. I know all eyes are on me. I'm to be the example setter because I'm the pastor, the spiritual leader. I fear I'll misstep and cause someone to stray because of my example.

Your Pastor Experiences Personal Turmoil

A great number of pastors, in churches both large and small, told me they were intensely lonely. How, you might ask, could a pastor — surrounded by a congregation of hundreds, even thousands of people — be lonely?

Few church members, if any, understand the loneliness of being a pastor.

I'm hungry for fellowship with my members. I need their help and encouragement. I get tired and discouraged. I struggle constantly with loneliness.

I found few pastors who had genuine friendships from within or outside the church.

I wish my members knew how friendless I am. (Actually I don't want the church members to know this, so I never let on — they don't know.) I don't have a single person in the city of my pastorate who I can expose my heart to or have an in-depth conversation with. For many years, my best friend in my city was a non-Christian. Then I led him to Christ. He's still my best friend, but I don't express my most heartfelt concerns to him. In these early years of his new Christian faith, I worry it might disillusion him.

I have a wonderful church, but they don't know that I live in the wilderness of loneliness.

It's hard to find close, available support from peers, so loneliness is a significant issue for me.

There's nobody to talk to in ministry when you're a pastor — except God, of course.

A recent study claims that 70 percent of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend.⁴ Pastors confessed:

I need spiritual and emotional encouragement from my church because ministry is very lonely.

At times I need help and encouragement from my members. I want them to 'pastor' me — the pastor! Church

members don't realize that the pastor is the only person in the church who doesn't have a pastor!

I am lonely. I lack confidants. It always helps to have a few who will encourage me and cheer me on.

Some pastors said they just wanted to fit in with their church members. They wanted to be one of them.

I'm a human being too, and I'm just as broken as they are. I'm one of them in every way.

I need to feel like I'm a part of the church family, not just a hired hand, expendable at will.

I wish they knew I am more like them than they realize. When I come to visit, or when I sit down with them at a church fellowship, I don't have to have a theological conversation about how the world should get right with God. Sometimes I just like to talk about football, or politics, or the weather, or what happened last night on *American Idol* — or what might happen next on *Survivor*. Sometimes I just want a normal conversation, like a normal person.

Your Pastor May Feel Like a “Lone Ranger”

Several ministers told me they felt like “Lone Ranger” pastors. Like other human beings, they yearned for friendship, yet the very nature of their jobs often kept them from developing deep friendships within the churches they served. Some of their greatest joys came from loving friendships within the congregation, invitations to eat at church families' tables, or a pleasurable one-on-one conversation with no spiritual agenda.

I wish more members would be interested in knowing me personally. Especially to get to know what I enjoy doing, as well

as just to realize that I'm a man with the same hopes and desires that they have.

I wish they knew I'm approachable, and they can talk to me about anything, even if it's criticism. I'm open to honest discussion, not easily off ended, and am not judgmental — although I think many church members view pastors as narrow-minded, harsh, judgmental, and detached from the real world outside the church.

It would be greatly beneficial if more parishioners took the time to understand my heart more, instead of assigning wrong motives based on behavior or statements I've made. I make every effort to be as transparent as I can, but many still don't know me.

I wish my members had a better understanding of my gifts, what I bring to pastoral ministry, and where I am limited and need more help, support, or encouragement.

While most pastors expressed an unsatisfied craving for sharing their souls with their members and enjoying deep, meaningful relationships, other pastors told me they have successfully solved the "Lone Ranger" pastor problem.

I am open with my members about most everything. I believe they appreciate candor for the most part — what I call 'vulnerable authoritativeness' — that is, they want to know I'm human, but they also want to know I'm a serious Christian, trying to live as an example to them. But I'm not 'omni-competent.'

I'm an introvert. I'm private about my personal life. I've shared all I care to share with them.

Since I've been in ministry, I've learned to share myself with my people. I find that they appreciate knowing my joys, sorrows,

victories, and defeats. When they know my struggles, they can pray for me in specific ways according to my needs.

I share my hopes, etc., within my area of leadership or with a small group of leaders within the church.

I don't feel restricted or somehow forced into hiding certain aspects of myself. While it's silly to reveal yourself fully to everybody or anybody, I have a lot of people — both inside and outside the church — to whom I can pour out my soul about personal issues and concerns.

Your Pastor Needs Understanding and Acceptance

The combined problems of loneliness, few close friends and trusted confidants, and an intimate knowledge of their own personal limitations can create the overwhelming need for understanding and personal acceptance by the church. Some pastors kept their inadequacies hidden, for fear they would lose the congregation's confidence, admiration, and/or respect.

If my weaknesses were revealed, how would my church members accept me, knowing my personal struggles?

I'm trying the best I can, but will mess up every once in a while.

It sounds ridiculous, but I'm sometimes afraid my church members will see how inexperienced I am in certain areas. If they knew, they might step in and exert control over me rather than work with me and support my weaknesses with their strength. I'm also afraid, as the pastor of a small church, that if I don't do everything right all the time and please everyone, my members will leave, the church won't grow, and we'll become another church planting casualty.

Personal pastoral weaknesses can keep some pastors from ever developing friendships among their congregations. According to an article in *LeadershipJournal.net*, “A new study by the Barna Group shows that 61 percent [of pastors] report difficulty creating and maintaining personal relationships.” In the same article, counselor Dr. Louis McBurney stated: “A majority of pastors in [my] care cited ‘lack of emotional intimacy with others’ as the main factor in their decision to seek counseling.” He said: “The expectations people have of pastors to always have answers and be competent to do almost anything just tends to shut pastors out from being open about who they are with somebody else. This may not be as true as it used to be, but many pastors were taught in Bible college and seminary not to get close to their people because it can create problems of jealousy and tension in the church.”⁵

Your Pastor Needs Support from Fellow Christians

As the story goes, Simeon Stylites, a fourth-century ascetic hermit, climbed on top of a forty-foot pillar and stayed there for many years without coming down. He wanted to be alone with God, closer to heaven, and away from people. Yet, even Stylites in his unusual solitude needed the support of fellow Christians. His dedicated followers hoisted up his basket of daily food to him so he wouldn't starve, and they kneeled beneath his pillar and prayed for him.

Pastors also said they needed the support of fellow Christians:

I hate to admit it, but I need a pat on the back, and I need it often.

I need spiritual support because I face the greatest threats that confront the church I serve. I'm the 'point man.' I need the prayers of everyone connected to my pastorate. I need help in the areas of organization, because I'm only one person and limited without others.

I need to be ministered to in all areas, as well as the rest of my congregation.

I need the support and encouragement — the friendship! — of fellow pastors. I've had this in some places of service, but not all.

Church members need to understand that pastors are human. We struggle with the same set of temptations and life stresses as they do. While we're responsible to teach the example of Christ's life, we fall short in practicing it just as they do. They need to help us! We live in the victory of grace — same as them.

I have personal needs just like they do. Any chance that a pastoral 'personal care' subcommittee of the board could be put in place to oversee the personal needs of the pastor and his spouse?

I bleed too. I have feelings, get discouraged and tired — and often feel stressed. I need encouragement.

I need the support of my church and family. I need them to believe in me.

I need emotional support because I'm human and need the understanding and encouragement of those I love and serve.

Your Pastor Gets Angry

Pastor "John" left the pastorate position in his small church four months ago. Three days ago, on a Saturday morning, he got a phone call from one of his former parishioners, who asked him: "Pastor John, some time ago, you and my wife were talking in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning between Sunday school and worship. What exactly were you talking about?"

The pastor told the former church member he honestly didn't remember the conversation. Then the member asked Pastor John if he had ever "touched" his wife. The pastor told him he had never touched her and, in fact, he'd not even seen her in almost four months. The pastor also offered to go back to that town, so they could talk about it face to face.

The member told Pastor John that wasn't necessary, but that the pastor should never contact his wife again.

Pastor John explained to me:

This is the kind of garbage pastors have to deal with, and yet we're expected to never get mad. There are stories I could tell that are much worse than this, yet if I lose my cool, I'm ripped to pieces at the next deacons' meeting. Is it any wonder that so many pastors have experienced burnout?

Several pastors mentioned feeling angry about certain incidents that happened in church. One particular pastor felt angry, and yet had no explanation for his anger.

I feel angry and don't know why. The church I pastor is doing very well, and is actually a pretty healthy church. But I feel angry, isolated, frustrated.

Your Pastor Experiences Fear

Many pastors expressed *personal* fears in their ministries. Most suffered these fears without any help from fellow Christians, their families, church members, or counselors. (Later, we'll look at the *ministry* fears pastors have.) They confessed:

I'm sometimes afraid I won't measure up to God's standard and won't receive a 'well done' when my ministry is through.

Perhaps part of this comes from working in small churches in small towns, where success is sometimes hard to see.

I have my own personal doubts, fears, temptations, and failings. I'm not some kind of super-Christian, but rather just another traveler on the road.

I have to wear so many different hats, I feel like I'll fail sooner or later, whether I really do or not.

I really love Jesus, but sometimes I feel scared, frightened, and overwhelmed.

At this point in my ministry — as I approach retirement — I wonder if I've really done in ministry what God wanted me to do.

Other pastors told me they greatly feared personal failure:

In this day and age when sex is marketed, and modesty is a thing of the past, I guard myself against being put into situations where I could, or would, be tempted to compromise.

I'm afraid of being unable to fulfill God's call upon my life. I also fear rejection, but failure ranks above that.

What if I'm unable to finish the task I was called to do, because I can't survive the ministry?

I'm scared of doing something that would bring reproach on the name of Christ or his church.

If I fail God, I'll feel I've wasted my life. I will have wasted the life he has given me.

I'm afraid I'm missing a ministry need due to my negligence.

I don't want to lapse into sin that would bring shame on the church. I've had the sad experience to see that happen more

than once to pastors. We all are only kept by the grace of God, and we dare not boast of our great faith.

I fear personal failure more than anything else.

I can't be unfaithful to my calling and disappoint God and the congregation — ruining what God has done.

It might surprise you, but fear was such a big problem for most pastors, I've given it a whole chapter later in the book. In chapter 8, we'll look more closely at what pastors fear and why.

Your Pastor Gets Hurt

Pastors, like most people, are sometimes treated with insensitivity. Church members can be so immersed in their own lifestyles, they forget common human courtesies, and they fail to express appreciation. Christians can also be quite critical of clergy. Pastors complained of church members treating them like “hired help,” “paid boys,” and “hirelings” — rather than respecting their divine calling as shepherd of the flock.

I have feelings too. I'm sometimes deeply wounded by hurtful and insensitive remarks or insinuations, yet I'm treated like it shouldn't bother me. Everyone else has feelings that I need to treat with tenderness and sensitivity, yet I'm not accorded that same kind of consideration. They think because I'm the pastor, I can take it.

I'm not a person who works just for a paycheck. I want to see this church become what God wants it to be.

I feel insulted when church members approach me with the attitude ‘you should be so honored that I am here to support you.’ It's as if I'm a house pet who needs to be petted.

More than anything, I wish they knew how very seriously I take God's call. I wish they knew how deep my desire is for genuine fellowship in our community.

I wish they could understand my sense of calling to this congregation, my motives for ministry, and my private spirituality.

I've not had a Christmas gift, birthday gift, gift of appreciation — nothing in four years of ministry at my church. And that hurts!

I'm often criticized when I've given my best. It seems my best is never quite good enough.

Although they don't say it out loud, I know my congregation thinks it's my fault that our church attendance isn't busting out at the seams.

Your Pastor Struggles to Meet Your Expectations

When church members view their pastor as a Spiritual Superman, they can place unrealistic expectations on his shoulders. Few seminaries or Bible colleges can adequately prepare a person for what he or she will encounter as they climb into the local pulpit and minister to a congregation. Pastors admitted they couldn't possibly live up to all their members' expectations:

I wish for understanding and compassion for me as a pastor. Each member seems to think he or she is the only person I have to serve in a day or week's time, when I am expected to serve hundreds of people. I often feel torn, not knowing who to make my top priority at the moment.

I wish people understood the complex nature of pastoral leadership. Pastors are expected to be experts at a variety of things. The pressures to perform and produce can be heavy.

Negotiating the rapids of change, handling conflict, and balancing priorities stretch us thin. I hold an MDiv and DMin degree, and yet find those degrees did little to prepare me for the stresses of staff dynamics, people issues, and vision-casting.

I wish people also knew how much I love being a pastor. It's so much a part of what I am in God's plan. The reality that a misstep of leadership or a dysfunctional congregation could end my ministry is a scary thought.

I wish church members knew the struggles that pastors have to face in juggling time between church, family, and other functions. Too many times, I feel that some church members expect their pastor to be Johnny-on-the-spot at all times. Most of us attempt to be there for our members, but at times it creates great difficulties for us and our families.

I am not the Savior. Jesus is. I cannot save a member's wayward child. Please don't expect me to.

I wish they understood that the pastor isn't a miracle worker. That's God's job.

A pastor has only the time, strength, and energy of any earthbound human being. Often church members expect a pastor to be supernaturally gifted and not bound by time or exhaustion. Some expectations are simply not realistic. One pastor acknowledged:

Too many times, I have been brought into a church that was in decline, told to grow it, and then had everyone stand back and leave it all up to me. While I bust my tail trying to do what the search committee asked me to do, support from church members has often ranged from lukewarm apathy to outright hostility. I'm expected to do this without making any changes or stepping on anyone's toes. They say they want me to bring in a vision, but my vision is supposed to be subservient to their

vision. It's almost as though they are looking for the next Adrian Rogers or Billy Graham. Sorry guys, I'm not it.

Interestingly, despite the loneliness, struggles, problems, limitations, and other ministry-related issues pastors deal with, they are among the most satisfied workers in America! A recent survey found that:

Pastors — perceived to be some of the most under-appreciated and on-demand workers in America — are actually the happiest and most satisfied in their jobs.... The University of Chicago found clergy as the top job for satisfaction among American workers; 87 percent of clergy reported being very satisfied. . . . In addition to being the most satisfied, clergy also outranked other American workers as being the happiest (67 percent).^{[6](#)}

Maybe that's because pastors know the work to which their head, heart, and hands are devoted is ultimately done for God himself. (We'll learn more about pastors' job satisfaction in chapter 13.)

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their personal lives?

- . They are often lonely and in need of close friends and encouragement.
- . They want to feel needed in their congregation.
- . Like every other human, they possess personal inadequacies and limitations.

- . Pastors aren't immune to life's problems or personal fears. They get discouraged and experience self-doubt. They need understanding, acceptance, and support just like their church members.
- . They can be hurt by criticism, insensitivity, or lack of appreciation.
- . They sometimes get angry.
- . Pastors often struggle to live up to congregational expectations, which are sometimes unrealistic and impossible to fulfill.
- . They don't possess every spiritual gift. Some areas of ministry may be difficult for them.
- . Pastors are not simply hired hands, but are God-called shepherds. (We'll look at what we mean by *call* in chapter 13.)

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Make an effort to personally know and befriend your pastor. Invite him out to lunch or to dinner at home with your family; seek to understand his unique spiritual gifts.
- . Give your pastor your listening ear when he needs to talk, but keep his conversation in complete confidence.
- . Realize your pastor isn't perfect. Give him needed understanding and grace. Celebrate and encourage his giftedness — don't criticize his imperfections and limitations.
- . Be available to your pastor when he experiences a personal problem. Let him know you're there to support and help him if he needs you.
- . Show your pastor that you appreciate him through cards, letters, and thoughtful words.

- Be careful what expectations you place on your pastor. Be realistic and be willing to serve beside him.
- Respect and treasure a pastor's God-call to ministry. Know that his main goal in life is to please God.
- Affirm your pastor as a valuable and effective spiritual leader.

CHAPTER 2: “MY SPIRITUAL LIFE SOMETIMES SUFFERS”

Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

AFTER JESUS’ BAPTISM, he retreated to the desert, fasted for forty days and forty nights, battled Satan, and prepared himself spiritually to minister to God’s people. Only then did he return to Galilee and begin to preach and call his disciples (Matthew 4). Throughout his ministry, Jesus often sought silent, lonely places — mountains, wildernesses, gardens — where he could be alone with God to pray, to fellowship, and to replenish himself spiritually. Jesus depended on prayer!

If Jesus so needed time to pray and refresh himself spiritually, how much more do today’s pastors need time in prayer and solitude with God to reenergize their spiritual batteries!

Thomas à Kempis wrote: “The person who wants to arrive at interiority and spirituality has to leave the crowd behind and spend some time with Jesus.”^{[1](#)} “I am the vine; you are the branches,” said Jesus in the Gospel of John. “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:1, 5).

Pastors, of all people, know this! They read John and Thomas à Kempis and others. But I was amazed at how many surveyed pastors admitted they felt spiritually dry, empty, and depleted. And many others confessed they greatly feared becoming spiritually dry.

A spiritually dry pastor? How can that be? That’s like a ship without a rudder, a snow cone without ice, a candle without a wick!

Aren't pastors the people church members look to for their own faith development and sustenance?

MOTHER TERESA'S "CRISIS OF FAITH"

Christians and Christian leaders were recently shocked to learn of Mother Teresa's half-century-long "crisis of faith." A woman of God, who devoted her entire life to his work, she wrote about the dryness, darkness, loneliness, and "torture" she suffered due to her inability to feel God's presence.

A letter she wrote to Archbishop Ferdinand Perier, in 1953, read: "Please pray specially for me that I may not spoil His work and that Our Lord may show Himself — for there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started 'the work.' "

Another letter (written in 1956) read: "Such deep longing for God —and — repulsed — empty — no faith — no love — no zeal. [The saving of] souls holds no attraction — Heaven means nothing — pray for me please that I keep smiling at Him in spite of everything."²

While Mother Teresa was alive, few people knew of her state of spiritual dryness. Surely, if anyone had it together spiritually, it was Mother Teresa! Yet, her life and her letters tell a different story.

Pastors told me they diligently tried to monitor and protect their personal faith because they knew their own spiritual dryness would hurt their congregation and ministry.

As my own spiritual condition goes, so go the ministry and the life of the congregation!

If I'm dry, how do I minister to others in my congregation?

I most fear becoming spiritually dry because of the strong temptation to rely upon the work of others — e.g., preaching other preachers' sermons, etc. My congregation would suffer.

Yet, in spite of their sincere efforts to ward off spiritual crises, they, too, honestly and openly expressed their state of spiritual dryness.

I worry about maintaining my personal relationship with God as I do ministry.

I've struggled with spiritual dryness in the past. I have a tendency to get so wrapped up in pastoral work (visiting, sermon preparation, counseling, etc.) that I neglect the most important part of my life as a pastor — my spiritual health (prayer and Bible study). As one friend of mine put it (about his struggle in this same area), 'I began to see that I loved the work of God more than the God of the work.'

Becoming spiritually dry is the greatest obstacle to a minister. It will impede the pastor's ability to be effective. We can get so distracted by other, important issues, and let our spiritual ground become fallow.

I'm very much afraid of becoming so bogged down with the demands of the church that I become spiritually dry.

Becoming spiritually dry is a great fear, for it would impact most every other area of my ministry.

I fear the lack of intimacy with Christ.

THE PATH TO BURNOUT

Some pastors admitted that burning out spiritually was their greatest fear:

Becoming spiritual dry — burning out spiritually — is my biggest fear. I'm afraid I'll get burned out spiritually, and just simply not have the desire to keep up the pace to do the things I need to do, and spend the necessary time in God's Word. I pray about this every day. At times I even think it may be happening. People do not understand that pastors have the same struggles and temptations as everyone else. While pastors are helping others in difficult times, who's helping them? It almost seems to be too much. Then, as I get spiritually tired, I feel as if I'm losing the desire to study. At times I feel that others don't care anyway. I'm afraid of losing the desire to keep on keeping on spiritually.

At least one pastor admitted that his spiritual struggle had led him to theological doubt — quite possibly the first step to spiritual burnout:

I stress to my congregation that I'm just like any of them, on a journey with Jesus Christ. I tell them I don't have it all together, but instead I wrestle and struggle through life just like they do. I communicate with them that there are times I even doubt God, and I wonder if the entire Christian story is really true at all. (I call those my 'John the Baptist moments'.)

Pastors who admit a less than enthusiastic faith may surprise many church members today, who wonder: "If our pastor 'loses' his faith, if he experiences theological doubt, if he burns out spiritually, what will happen to us and our personal faith? We depend on pastors to keep our waning faith strong!"

Your Pastor Has Too Much to Do

Why do pastors become spiritually dry or worry about burning out spiritually? Ministers admitted they just had too much to do in their vocations as church pastors. They had little time to spend in personal Bible study, meditation, contemplation, and prayer.

I stay so busy with ministry that I hardly have time for my own personal spiritual life.

I have a big problem with time restraints — mainly trying to balance study, pastoral care, administration, and all of the other ministries in which a pastor is involved. Too often what is sacrificed is personal spiritual growth and devotion.

I have many requirements and too much paperwork, and not nearly enough reflection or meditation time. I would appreciate more uninterrupted study.

I have too much 'religious work' and not enough spiritual replenishment.

Research shows that all Christians, not just pastors, also face a work overload that often keeps them from spending an adequate amount of time with God. In fact, according to a new study, almost six of every ten Christians find their busy schedule keeps them from spending time with God. And when it comes to pastors, the statistics are just as sobering. Almost two out of every three pastors, according to the study, claimed an "overloaded pace of life" had gotten in the way of their spiritual growth.

Responding to this study, pastor Marcus Yoars writes: "Maybe a study like this will wake some of us up to this reality: We, of all people, must find a way to place the Lord above every urgent need, every pressing appointment, every desperate cry. . . . How can we truly minister without first being ministered to by God and receiving His empowerment? We must place Him above all."³

Some pastors claimed they spent so much time in Bible study for sermon preparation, they had little time left for personal Scripture study and prayer.

As much as I have to study and read for sermon preparation, I must often remind myself to study and read for personal interaction with God.

We must be led by the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit to be of use by Jesus Christ. It's scary for me to get so wrapped up in study for sermon preparation that I forget to spend adequate personal quiet time with the Lord.

Your Pastor Is Always Giving to Others

Pastors can be like large water pitchers. They can pour out lots of water for others if their pitchers are full. But what happens when they give others all the water in their pitchers? They run dry, their pitchers are empty, and they have no more water to give. Pastors must “go back to the well” and refill their water pitchers often to avoid spiritual dryness and emptiness. They must spend time in spiritual meditation.

What is meditation? It's the art of pondering, reflecting, or considering. In other words, “Christian meditation involves, not emptiness, but fullness. It means being attentive to God. . . . We meditate to give God's words the opportunity to penetrate, not just our minds, but our emotions — the places where we hurt — and our will — the place where we make choices and decisions. We meditate to encounter the Living Word, Jesus himself.”^{[4](#)}

We meditate Two pastors said:

The ministry is a vocation where one constantly gives. There comes a time when there's a real need for receiving, and outside of personal time with God, there aren't many opportunities for receiving.

I wish church members knew how spiritual exhaustion resulting from always giving, but never receiving, engenders

bitterness. I occasionally mask that bitterness with an outer façade of happiness. Sometimes though, I feel that the façade might burst like a dam!

“I know the conflicted feeling of standing up to preach and knowing that my own soul is empty and dry,” writes pastor Lance Witt, founder of Replenish Ministries, and a former executive pastor at Saddleback Church. “I know what it is to feed others while neglecting to feed myself. It’s no longer safe to assume that people in ministry have healthy souls. . . . Ministry, which we would assume would enhance our relationship with God, can actually become a threat to our relationship with God.”⁵

FAITH ALONG THE WAY

Some surveyed pastors expressed a strong, rich, and vibrant faith. They had learned to simply abide. They knew that: “Abiding gives us the ‘rest’ we need to bear a much greater yield. When we spend intimate time with our Savior, we are strengthened and refreshed to do His work.”⁶

These pastors wrote:

I enjoy a strong faith, and as long as my faith is strong, I believe I can endure anything. I may sometimes hurt, but I’ll heal as long as I have zeal for God.

I can’t lose that living sense of [the] presence of Jesus [in] sermon preparation, witnessing — there’s too much at stake eternally. My personal time with Jesus is so very wonderful at this time, continuing to overcome Satan’s presence is my deepest wish.

Through the years, I’ve learned to make time for my own spiritual development.

Many more pastors, however, had deep concerns about their personal faith. Their lack of personal prayer bothered them greatly.

Your Pastor Needs Time in Prayer

I found few pastors who felt satisfied with their personal prayer life, or felt they had enough time each day to spend with God in prayer. One pastor noted that the business of ministry contributed to his lack of focus on his own spirituality and his personal need for prayer, while another came flat out and said she just didn't have time.

In fact, a recent survey conducted by Ellison Research exposed these hard truths about the prayer lives of average Protestant ministers:[7](#)

Are Protestant ministers satisfied with their personal prayer life?

16 percent	Very satisfied
47 percent	Somewhat satisfied
30 percent	Somewhat dissatisfied
7 percent	Very dissatisfied

How much does the average Protestant minister pray during the day?

Most (actual percentage not given)	Spend 39 minutes in prayer
21 percent	Spend 15 minutes or less in prayer

What percentage of this prayer time is spent practicing each facet of prayer?

32 percent	Making requests
20 percent	Listening to God
18 percent	Giving thanks

17 percent	Praising God
14 percent	Confessing sin

What and who do ministers pray for?

The individuals in their congregations (the most common topic of their prayers)

The congregation's spiritual health

The church's spiritual growth

Their own wisdom leading the church

Interestingly, ministers pray the least for the concerns and needs of their denomination.

Your Pastor Needs a Praying Congregation

Not only did pastors admit to spending inadequate time in prayer, but they also admitted they needed more prayer support from church members. They craved their congregation's prayers!

Often we pastors aren't vocal enough in telling our congregations that we need them to pray a 'hedge of protection' around us. When they pray for us, we'll know we're supported spiritually, and that ministry is not our work, but God's work.

I have a desperate need for prayer warriors. We all get off track and out of tune with our Christian walk just like anyone else. And it takes supporters in this area to pray faithfully for us daily!

I need much prayer support from our church members. All pastors do!

I would hope that my members know of the absolute need I have for their intercessory prayer.

I need my congregation's prayers on Sunday morning especially (and all week long) as I care for people, write sermons, seek to hear the Lord as to the vision of the church, and deal with the 'alligators' — I want them to know that I serve with fear and trembling, and only find my confidence in Christ. Often I feel weak, especially on Sunday morning.

Leadership can be a lonely venture. I wish more church members would realize how much I need their faithful prayer support. For me, ministry is about engaging people in a life-changing relationship with Jesus. I need prayer to do that!

It's my church's prayers that keep me going.

The apostle Paul continually told people he prayed for them: "We always thank God for all of you, *mentioning you in our prayers*. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thesalonians 1:2 – 3, emphasis mine).

In fact, he told the same church in his second letter that he was praying "constantly" for them, that God would count them worthy of their calling and fulfill every good purpose and act of their faith (2 Thessalonians 1:11). But Paul also asked people to specifically pray for him (1 Thessalonians 5:25).

"Finally, brothers," he wrote in 2 Thessalonians, "*pray for us* that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And *pray* that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith" (3:1 – 2, emphasis mine).

Just as Paul needed people's prayers, so our pastors today need the prayers of their church members.

WORKING THROUGH SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

At least one pastor said he had worked through his spiritual dryness, and he had made a discovery:

I no longer fear becoming spiritually dry . . . I've been there, and I have found God is in the desert in a more real way than in lush gardens.

I see coming together in spiritual community as a growing trend among pastors today. In cities nationwide, pastors are meeting together regularly for prayer. Researcher Alice Patterson says: "It's not the dry, boring, superficial prayer of yesterday. It's prayer with a purpose: to see repentance, reconciliation, and revival come to their cities." Pastors are making community prayer a priority in their busy schedules. Through their coming together to pray, they build relationships with other pastors and realize they aren't alone in ministry struggles. Their transparency in sharing prayer requests and struggles with each other, Patterson explains, causes a bond to form over their mutual challenges and goals.

Pastors who participate in this kind of prayer also admit to powerfully experiencing God's presence during these special times with pastors of different denominations, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Praying with other pastors in their city can bring a sense of co-pastoring to meet the community's needs. Former competitiveness becomes cooperation.

Pastors admit these times of community prayer also bring them closer to God in a personal way.^{[8](#)}

LASTING JOY IN MINISTRY

If a pastor wants to experience lasting joy in ministry, he must spend vast amounts of time with God, and get to know Christ better and better. "It's way too easy to just go through the motions instead of basing your ministry on a growing relationship with Christ. In fact,

your ministry will have no impact if you're not developing a more intimate relationship with Christ. . . . A dry relationship with Christ will kill your joy in ministry as well," advises pastor Rick Warren.

Warren encourages pastors to spend time with God, and writes: "When we get busy in ministry, we often let our time with God suffer. But we must guard our time with God very jealously. Serving God without spending time with Him is fruitless."⁹

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their faith?

- . Pastors can, for various reasons, experience spiritual dryness or may simply be afraid of becoming spiritually dry.
- . They may have difficulty finding time in their busy daily schedules to spend time with God in prayer, personal Bible study, or meditation.
- . Pastors are in the business of giving themselves to others, which leads to spiritual exhaustion if they are not receiving any love and care in return. Pastors need to receive.
- . Pastors need a strong, vibrant personal faith if they are to be effective ministers, so spiritual burnout is something they fear.
- . They worry their own spiritual dryness will impact the faith of their congregations.
- . They need to be supported by the prayers of their church members if they are to stay spiritually strong.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Ask God for wisdom and strength in order to spiritually support your pastor.
- . Pray without ceasing for your pastor. Support him, his family, and his ministry with your constant prayers.
- . Through emails, notes, and letters, tell your pastor you are praying for him. From time to time, ask him how you can better pray for him.
- . When time affords the opportunity, pray with your pastor.
- . Encourage your pastor to spend time in spiritual contemplation.[10](#)
- . Encourage your pastor to learn the art of meditation.[11](#)
- . Understand your pastor needs scheduled personal solitude to spend time with God, to pray, to study and meditate on Scripture. Encourage and respect his times of solitude, times he sets aside for his spiritual growth.
- . As a church, encourage your pastor to take spiritual retreats. If possible, give him the gift of a spiritual renewal getaway.
- . Find out what keeps your pastor spiritually replenished, then encourage him to take the time to do those things.

CHAPTER 3: “MINISTRY HAS TAKEN A TOLL ON ME”

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Proverbs 3:7 – 8

SHEPHERDING PEOPLE REQUIRES good physical and emotional health. Pastors consistently encounter serious human needs and congregational crises that can cause them great physical exertion and emotional stress. Most pastors work long hours, and their work plans are constantly interrupted with unscheduled emergencies. Pastors told me:

I wish my congregation understood the concept of ‘caretaker fatigue.’

Pastors become weary, and we experience the same physical and emotional hurts and pains that other people experience.

It seems like I spend so much time taking care of others, I don’t take the time to take care of myself — emotionally, physically, or even sometimes spiritually.

THE HIGH COST OF MINISTRY

Due to the nature of their work, pastors can have unhealthy eating habits. They often eat on the run at fast-food restaurants (because it’s easy . and quick), grab a caffeine-laden latte with a troubled church member, or indulge at church potluck feasts.

Physical exertion, emotional stress, and unhealthy eating habits can cause pastors to become physically exhausted, emotionally burned out, ill, and overweight. Some surveyed pastors admitted:

At the moment I feel spiritually, emotionally, and physically drained.

My overall health is bad. I'm scared that after a BA degree and two Master's degrees, I'll have a heart attack or something, and not experience my whole career.

Most church members have no idea of the pressures that are associated with a pastor's job and his constant spiritual oversight. The responsibility never goes away, even when you are off. And it has affected my physical health in terrible ways.

I'm learning that, physically, I can only do as much as God enables one person to do.

So extensive is the problem of unhealthy pastors, recently Duke Endowment awarded the Duke Divinity School twelve million dollars to research the health of every United Methodist pastor in North Carolina. The study will include a health assessment of the ministers and what they can do to improve their health.[1](#)

Unhealthy pastors and increasing costs of clergy health insurance have driven several denominations to confront the problem by creating health-assessment websites, providing, among other things, suggestions for improving clergy health.

Physical Exhaustion

Most pastors told me shepherding a flock proved physically challenging. They said their vocation often included too much to do, long working hours, not enough church staff or volunteer help, and a pressure to get everything done on time.

There's so much to do and so little time to do it. I try to carve out margins, but they get busted quickly quite often.

Because we're a small church, fewer men are available to do physical labor. I need help not to overdo it, but I rarely have that help.

It's easy for me to get discouraged when I'm physically too busy.

There's just simply not enough time to get everything done.

Nobody knows the pastoral load pastors often have unless they've been in this position.

One pastor talked about the physical work required just for a church member's funeral:

I find a dedicated bereavement ministry to be quite physically exhausting. It involves funeral preparations, funeral planning, grief discussions with the deceased's family, the time necessary to prepare for a meaningful funeral service, follow-up ministry, etc. I need recovery time when it's all over because I'm exhausted. And bereavement ministry is just one part of my job as pastor.

Illness and Grief

Several pastors told me their physical illnesses — both acute and chronic conditions — as well as personal grief, further complicated their ministry duties:

I have chronic back pain that causes me a lot of trouble and interferes with my ministry.

Because of my physical illness, I don't always have the strength to give, to pray, and to study.

At least one pastor said he had taken over full-time caretaking for a chronically ill spouse. He loved his spouse and wanted to take care of her, but admitted the additional work increased his physical exhaustion. He was unable to accomplish all he wanted to do at church, but how could he ignore his wife's needs?

Another pastor wrote about his personal secret sorrow:

I wish my church members knew how much I miss my dad (who died twenty-four years ago), and my father-in-law (who died four years ago), and the deep loss I feel each day from these deaths.

Emotional Stress

Not only is the pastor's job physically challenging, but the nature of the work produces unusual emotional stress. Pastors confessed:

I need emotional support. When the pastor doesn't have the emotional support that is needed, then he can quickly be depleted of physical energy, which will lead to problems in many other areas of the pastor's ministry and family life.

I need support and encouragement because the burden of ministry can grind you down.

For years I neglected the emotional gauge on the dashboard of my life, even though I carefully monitored the physical and spiritual gauges. Preaching and pastoring require an enormous amount of emotional energy, and I need deliberate activities and time built into my schedule in order to recharge my emotional capacity.

Three decades ago, a study of five thousand Protestant clergy showed that “three-quarters reported stressful experiences, often severe in nature, characterized by reports of such emotional states as frustration, anguish, depression and doubts about one’s competence. Stress was experienced across the entire lifespan, though it tended to decrease later in one’s career. The most commonly reported source of stress, as might be expected, was one’s relationship to the congregation, particularly in the realm of personal and ideological conflicts.”²

Not much has changed in thirty years! Other pastors said:

Just the other day, I had some emotional ‘recovery time’ planned, and a man in our church committed suicide. The afternoon went from refreshing to emotionally exhausting.

Leading a congregation that does not see the changes needed to grow is emotionally stressful.

I love being a pastor and preaching, but it is so easy to get to the place of being burned out. Congregations sometimes don’t understand this.

The stress of my job is incredibly difficult to cope with.

I need my church members’ support in order to maintain physical and emotional health.

I need encouragement and support because I have clinical depression.

THE HIGH COST OF STRESS

We’ve known for years what stress can do to our bodies. Doctors have linked stress to everything from the development of cancer to

high blood pressure, heart attacks, diabetes, asthma, allergies, ulcers, colitis, alcoholism, smoking, obesity, headaches, backaches, and more.³

Pastors cannot afford to become victims of stress. Too many people depend on them. If pastors live and work under constant and severe stress, they will get sick. It's a well-known fact. Stress will eventually either interfere with their ministry or cut it short.

"Sometimes our bodies will tell us a truth that our minds don't," writes Susan Forward, in her book *Emotional Blackmail*. "We may say we're really not anxious — then notice that we're drenched with perspiration. No, no, nothing's wrong — so why is my stomach in knots? The body's responses cut through denial and rationalization, and the body won't lie to you."⁴

Too much stress will cause emotional and physical burnout. One recent study showed that 45.5 percent of pastors say they've actually had to take a leave of absence from their ministries because of depression or extreme burnout.⁵ That's nearly half of today's pastors!

Burnout is emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. It robs the pastor of his joy, his feeling of accomplishment, and his confidence of his calling to minister to others. Burnout not only affects the pastor, but his whole family, as they worry about him and wonder how they can help him. Depression and burnout go hand in hand. During burnout, ministry becomes "just a job" with little sense of reward or fulfillment. For some victims of burnout, God may seem distant and inaccessible.

Unhealthy Eating and Lack of Exercise

A number of pastors told me they ate unhealthy food — and too much of it! — and they struggled with obesity. They also admitted

they didn't exercise. Some admitted they were organized, but lacked discipline; others said they were tired — too tired to get the exercise they need — and overweight.

I don't get enough physical exercise. It's too easy at the end of the day to veg in front of the TV.

I find it so easy to let my own personal well-being deteriorate as I don't afford myself enough time for exercise, and I end up overeating.

I do need encouragement physically. I'm a diabetic and not in very good physical shape. I need to be encouraged to take time from ministry to minister to myself, so that I'll be healthy enough to continue with my ministry.

Like many pastors, I struggle with a weight problem, and I think I'd be more effective if I were in better physical condition. But the demands on my time allow for very little physical activity.

I need to exercise more. I'm a little overweight and feel hindered by that. But I don't have time to exercise. So in reality, I just need more time.

The problem of unhealthy pastors has become critical. In 2004, a survey of 2,500 ministers by Pulpit and Pew, based at Duke, found 76 percent of Christian clergy were overweight, compared with 61 percent of the general population.^{[6](#)}

Lack of Rest, Recreation, and Retreat

A majority of the pastors surveyed confessed they desperately needed more time to rest, get away from pastoral responsibilities, and have some relaxing fun — some balance in their lives. Many would give anything for a simple sabbatical, but it's hard enough to

take a single day off, let alone a week or month. In their time crunch, the first thing to go was rest. They wrote:

While church members can miss any Sunday they need to for a weekend away with their family, a pastor cannot do this. All the pastors I know are given two weeks a year for vacation. But even then, if there's a death or some other emergency, the pastor will get a call and go back if possible.

My church provides a one-month personal enrichment leave after every five years of service. That's nice, but it's not enough. I think senior pastors need about four weeks for soul care and physical recharging a year — plus their vacation time. Then every five years or so, an extended leave for eight to twelve weeks for theological study, seminar learning, and other training.

According to a 1997 survey, the average American pastor works about fifty-five hours a week.⁷ A pastor's work really never ends! He's on call 24/7, and often misses meals, loses sleep, and works during his scheduled personal free time or vacation days. He can never say "my work for today is finished," because his work involves people. Pastors agreed they needed more free time and weekends away — the kind other families take for granted.

Although my church allows me four weeks of vacation (based on my number of years in ministry), I still need time away just to study and to take a sabbatical. Members don't realize how draining a pastor's life is in just a typical week of ministry. I work Sundays through Thursdays, and take Fridays and Saturdays off. But even with this schedule, I often come home drained on Thursday evenings from counseling, studying, meetings, etc., and spend Fridays and Saturdays trying to recoup. And then, because members expect the pastor to preach Sunday mornings and evenings, and teach on Wednesday evenings, I often play catch-up on my days off.

So urgent is the need for pastors to rest, renew, and reflect that in 2008 Lilly Endowment, Inc., an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation, awarded 120 grants of up to \$45,000 each to Christian congregations for what they called the National Clergy Renewal Program. Lilly stated that these “renewal periods are not vacations, but times for intentional exploration and reflection, for drinking again from God’s life-giving waters, for regaining enthusiasm and creativity for ministry.”⁸

Pastors can find opportunities for physical, emotional, and spiritual renewal at pastors’ schools. They can spend a week at a resort, a seminary or college campus, attend worship services and seminars, dialogue with other pastors around the country, and enjoy a break from the demanding responsibilities of the pastorate. Some pastors’ schools are extremely reasonable cost-wise, and provide wonderful accommodations. For instance, Zondervan hosts the National Pastors Convention each February in San Diego, California, for pastors and their spouses.⁹

Our school, Beeson Divinity School, provides an annual pastors’ school each July on the campus of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. We have special tracks for the pastor’s wife as well as their children and teenagers.¹⁰

These times away give pastors (and their families) fresh energy and renewed enthusiasm to return to the demands of ministry.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their health?

- . Due to everyday ministry demands, pastors often experience physical fatigue, stress, and exhaustion.
- . Pastors have vocations that require constant responsibility and care for others. They are never off work.
- . Some pastors suffer from acute or chronic illness, and their health can interfere with their ministry to others.
- . Pastors often live under constant emotional stress and risk lapsing into burnout.
- . They may have little time or energy to take care of their personal health, eat healthy foods, and exercise.
- . Pastors need regularly scheduled time away from their church ministries to rest, replenish their energies, and recreate their passion.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Before you call on your pastor for help, first examine your need. Is this a situation you can handle by yourself or through the help of family members or friends? Is your need urgent? Remember, many church members may need your pastor's help for serious situations, and his physical energy can drain away quickly.
- . Volunteer to help your pastor accomplish various tasks in the church. Give him the gift of hands-on help with the details of ministry.
- . Be especially sensitive to calling on your pastor if he (or his spouse) is dealing with personal injury or illness. Consider his physical limitations as you examine your need for him.

- Know the signs of pastoral burnout, and be alert to your pastor's mental and emotional health.*
- If your pastor shows symptoms of potential burnout, talk with him, and as a church, offer to get him professional help.
- Establish a pastoral care team. Select a handful of people from your congregation who will be charged with overseeing the welfare of your pastor and his family.[11](#)
- Make sure your pastor takes the necessary time to eat right, exercise, and take care of his personal health. Stress to him the importance of taking care of himself and not feeling guilty for doing so.
- Learn about pastors' retreat programs, pastors' schools and conferences, as well as relaxing getaway locations, and, as a congregation, give your pastor the gift of rest and renewal.
- Make sure your pastor (and his family) take much-needed vacations. Be generous in giving him time away from church responsibilities.

*Some signs of pastoral burnout:[12](#)

1. Decreased energy — “keeping up the pace” is becoming harder and harder
2. Feeling of failure in vocation
3. Reduced sense of reward in return for the selflessness of ministry
4. Sense of helplessness — displaying an inability to see a way out of one's problems

5. Cynicism and negativism — about self, others, work, and the world in general

CHAPTER 4: “MY SPOUSE AND CHILDREN NEED YOUR GRACE AND LOVE”

Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.”

Proverbs 31:28 – 29

WOULD YOU ANSWER a newspaper want ad like this one?

Help wanted: Pastor’s wife. Must sing, play music, lead youth groups, raise seraphic children, entertain church notables, minister to other wives, have ability to recite Bible backward, and choreograph Christmas pageant. Must keep pastor sated, peaceful, and out of trouble. Difficult colleagues, demanding customers, erratic hours. Pay: \$0.^{[1](#)}

We can shake our heads and laugh at this ridiculous want ad, but for many pastors’ wives today it rings all too true. Clergy families are often placed high on pedestals, and expected to be everything to everybody in every way — all while living a “fishbowl” public existence.

While I’m aware a number of clergy spouses are male, the majority are female. Because of that — and because I received few responses from female clergy about the role of their husband-spouses — in this chapter, I will be concentrating on the spouses of male pastors, the quintessential pastor’s wives. How often church members expect the pastor’s wife to be the ideal Proverbs 31 woman! For many wives, these unrealistic expectations put pressure on their marriage and often cause serious problems.

“Statistics indicate that beneath the smiling, steadfast veneer of a pastor’s wife, there often lies a deeply isolated woman who, due to her husband’s constant commitment to his congregants, frequently feels neglected and left without a support system of her own.” A survey by *Focus on the Family* found that 88 percent of pastors’ wives experience or have experienced depression.^{[2](#)}

It’s hard to believe, but eight in ten pastors’ wives say they don’t feel appreciated or accepted by their husbands’ congregations, and the same number wish their husbands would leave the ministry for another profession. Spousal issues are, in fact, the main reason pastors leave the ministry. The divorce rate among pastors is 50 percent, the same rate as the rest of the country.^{[3](#)}

These are grim statistics — and, of course, there are an abundance of exceptions — but when I asked pastors about their wives and home life in my anonymous survey, I did receive the same grim responses. Ministers’ families seem to be in crisis.

DEFENDING THEIR WIVES

Most pastors seemed surprisingly protective of their wives, defending them and their interactions with church members and church staff. One pastor wrote that while his wife was seminary-trained and fully competent in ministry, their church would not allow her to hold any kind of leadership position. On the other hand, another pastor complained that his wife was treated and viewed as a sort of associate pastor.

The problems cut to the heart, as you can see here:

My congregation doesn’t understand or seem to care about the effect their harsh treatment has — even when masked as humor — on my wife and children.

I'm not perfect, nor is my family. We have the same fears and uncertainties as families in my congregation. We're also human, and we make mistakes.

I wish my members knew how very much is at stake for my family and me. If this position doesn't work out, then not only do I lose my job and income, but my whole family will have to relocate. This would involve my children being uprooted from friends and support systems. The stakes are high for my marriage and my kids.

Several pastors yearned for church members to appreciate their wives, and to realize how valued they are in the church.

I wish church members knew that the pastor's spouse often receives less public affirmation yet quietly carries a heavier load.

My family has felt more loved and accepted here after only three months than we did in my previous church after ten years. I want to thank my congregation for that gift!

Pastors also wished church members would befriend their wives:

I wish my members would include my wife when they get together for tea, coffee, or day trips. She needs friends just like they do, but they always leave her out.

I'd love to have some people willing to reach out to my wife; to be genuine friends with her, and not just see her as the pastor's wife.

Three pastors wanted the congregation to know how much their families meant to them:

I wish they knew how loyal I am to my family, and how much my family means to me.

I pray daily I can be the husband, father, and pastor God wants me to be. I love my family!

My wife is my partner in the ministry, so we have more time together than most pastors and their wives — in Bible study, prayer, and pastoral ministry. We also visit together and counsel other couples together.

Another pastor also wrote about his unique ministry partnership with his wife, but sadly from a different perspective:

I need support from my members because of my home life. My wife had a stroke a few years ago, and still struggles to read and write, or even to talk. She gets very frustrated with herself, and that spills out onto me sometimes. I want to support her, but feel like I've lost my helpmate in ministry, who used to give us some of our best ideas and who was the better counselor.

The virtual loss of his wife as a helpmate caused a hole in this pastor's ministry and home life that he needed his church members to recognize. Sadly, it is precisely this delicate relationship between home life and church life that throws many pastors off balance.

LACK OF TIME WITH FAMILY

Pastors told me they constantly battled between meeting church members' needs and meeting their own family's needs. Pastors gave so much time to ministry-related issues that they had little time left over to give their family. They confessed:

We have to set boundaries between church and family for the welfare of our family — not because we want to shut church members out, but for us to be a healthy family, we have to have space and time that is 100 percent free of anything church related. And that's not a slam on our members!

I need to learn how to better structure my time so I can accomplish more for the kingdom and spend more time with my family — making sure I don't neglect my own personal growth as a Christian and a leader.

I need to take my wife out to dinner and not be interrupted by my cell phone. Most of us pastors keep office hours, and members need to call then — unless it's an emergency.

I wish the congregation would show more respect for my personal time with my family. That would be a great stress reliever.

I wish my congregation realized that all of my life doesn't center around the church, but instead, I work toward a time balance between God, family, marriage, kids, church, self, and community.

Being a pastor consumes my life 24/7, and leaves virtually no time or energy to devote to family or other interests.

Three pastors worried that so many church demands, and the resulting lack of time with their wives, might hurt their marriages:

No one sees how much my wife gives up so I can be a pastor. She would like me to be spending time with her, but so many times I am studying or talking on the phone, and she eats supper alone. No one sees those things. I sometimes wonder how long she'll put up with it.

I fear losing my family because I am too busy.

If I did everything I needed to do for the church, I'd wind up divorced — on grounds of abandonment.

PASTORAL MARRIAGES ON THE ROCKS

When on March 22, 2006, Mary Winkler shot and killed her pastor-husband at their home in Selmer, Tennessee, members of her church — as well as the nation — admitted shock. The congregation knew nothing about their . terrible home life. When police arrested her, she confessed: “I guess I just got to a point and snapped.”⁴

The Winklers’ congregation considered Mary a good mother and supportive wife. In fact, her attorney told one television station, “I think the accumulations of the pressures of life in and of itself certainly would have some factor in the case.”⁵

While the Winkler case proved extreme, clergy families — unbeknownst to most of their congregations — face a myriad of marital problems, which a large number were asked to explain in a 1992 survey by *Leadership* magazine.⁶ Here’s a quick glance at the factors those pastors blamed for their marital woes (they checked as many factors as applied):

Insufficient time together	81 percent
Use of money	71 percent
Income level	70 percent
Communication difficulties	64 percent
Congregational friction	63 percent
Differences over leisure activities	57 percent
Difficulties in raising children	53 percent
Sexual problems	46 percent
Anger toward spouse	41 percent
Differences over ministry career	35 percent
Differences over spouse’s career	25 percent

It surprised me how many pastors admitted in their survey responses that their wives had snapped, given up, become

unsupportive, or simply withdrew from the church. They wrote:

I receive no support from my wife. She just doesn't care — about the church or me!

My wife has been a great help at times, but at other times she has caused me many problems in the church.

Even though I felt God's call to move to another church, my wife refused to go. I stayed against my better judgment and reaped a whirlwind of problems because of it.

My biggest problem? My marriage! I suffer from a lack of support and understanding from my wife.

My wife and I have had marriage counseling in past years, but my congregation doesn't know this. My marriage has definitely been the most difficult area of my life.

My wife sees my church ministry as a rival, and it causes problems between us.

PRESSURE TO BE PERFECT

Some marital problems result when church members expect a pastor's family to be flawless examples for their own families to follow. They may expect excellent marriages and perfect children. When a pastor experiences conflict in a marriage or his children get into trouble, the whole community usually knows about it. Private life proves a rarity for the preacher's household, especially in the small community church.

One recent study shows that 80 percent of pastors believe pastoral ministry has a negative affect on their families, while 60 percent of pastors and their families are feeling the pressure to be a

picture-perfect family for their churches and communities.⁷ It's not hard to imagine the realities of such statistics and the frustration and heartache caused by them.

The pastors who responded to my survey spoke quite openly — even angrily — about their fears, worries, and home-life difficulties due to their vocation in ministry.

I wish my members knew what kind of double standards they often place on my family.

I wish my congregation would accept the fact that my sons are human and weren't born perfect little saints. It bothers me that there are people in my congregation that expect my sons to be perfect, and they have no problem conveying that message to them. It's difficult enough for them that they are expected to participate in everything in the church. They certainly don't need the congregation's criticism too!

I wish they knew I'm scared to death they are going to expect my kids to be unreasonably different from other kids. I remember hearing someone tell me that preachers' kids always go off the deep end, eventually. I suspect that this is at least in part because of the fishbowl that church members put them in. I want my kids to be normal kids, which includes occasionally doing things that make everyone else around them go nuts.

Recent studies show that 65 percent of pastors (that's a full two thirds) feel their personal lives are under scrutiny.⁸ What did they say is being scrutinized?

44 percent	Their children's lifestyle choices
32 percent	The way they discipline their children

26 percent	Where they send (or don't send) their kids to school
25 percent	The car they drive, clothes they wear, and vacations they take

Said one of the *Leadership* survey respondents: "I got hateful email just for buying my wife a diamond ring for our twenty-fifth anniversary a few months after a stewardship campaign." Many pastors feel that average church members are rarely criticized when they send their children to private schools, drive nice cars, wear designer clothes, take lavish vacations, and give expensive gifts to family members.

THE PASTOR AND HIS CHILDREN

New studies now show that many fathers in America are becoming more involved with parenting than in past times. Michael Kimmel, author of *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, writes: "Men today are far more involved with their families than they have been at virtually any other time in the last century." They "hug their kids more, help with homework more, tell kids they love them more," and so on. According to Kimmel, a recent Pew survey found that, increasingly, parents rank their relationships with their kids as more important than their relationship with their spouse!⁹

The pastor and his wife, like most Christian parents, want to rear up children who know, love, and serve God as the top priority in their lives. They want their children to possess a biblical worldview and become dedicated believers in Jesus Christ, and they know that godly children come from faithful and consistent parenting — which takes time spent with them! As pastors admitted in the survey, they have little time and energy outside church ministry to give their children.

My ministry has greatly expanded, and expectations are largely out of control. My time with my family has been reduced

beyond reason. My ministry to my own children can never be recovered.

My church needs to realize I'm also a father. I need time to be with my children. I need to be at my son's soccer game or my daughter's dance recital. I want to be available to my members, but please remember I'm also a dad.

I don't want my child to feel abandoned by me. I feel as if I'm conscious of this danger, but I'm still overwhelmed by the demands of church life. I'm missing my daughter's growing-up years.

Pastors admitted they worried about the things all Christian parents are concerned about:

My kids are still young, but I've watched kids break their parents' hearts, and it's tough. I fear what might happen later on.

I fear for the well-being of my children as they grow up in a secular world. My fear is that they won't follow Christ.

I worry about my children's future.

I have one daughter. We have a great relationship. She's eleven, and I love her so much. I don't want her to step away from Jesus.

I fear that my children have a lack of intimacy with Christ.

Other pastors listed fears and concerns only the clergy families would encounter, problems specific to preachers' kids (PKs). They included:

I wish church members would treat my kids as normal.

My son is the most important thing in my life. I worry about him because preacher's kids have a reputation.

I'm afraid that one day I'll have to leave my teenaged children because I've been posted to another church assignment.

I've seen so many messed-up children of pastors — that scares me the most about my kids. Most of the difficult members in my church were pastors' kids!

My children don't care much for the church anymore, since my congregation fired me. It affected my whole family, especially my kids. I would not wish that horrible experience on my worst enemy. Most church members don't realize that finding a new church after you have been canned takes a long time. This leads to financial debt that takes years to pay off. Meanwhile, you have to keep explaining to search committees years later that no, you were not accused of anything immoral or illegal. The impact on the pastor's kids is enormous. I know of other pastors' children that have also been turned off to church because of the way the churches treated their parents.

I fear I'll have problems with my children when they get older. I'm afraid they may rebel against the church and some of the unrealistic expectations the church placed on them as PKs.

I'm afraid my two children will grow up, finish college, and never darken the door of a church again. They've had a good home with parents who did not let the church schedule ruin their lives, but they've seen the irrelevance of all the church has to offer and want to run like hell away from it.

While most pastors expressed fear and concern about their children, one pastor expressed unusual optimism about his child!

I'm thrilled to see my daughter developing a strong faith, and being open and honest about her faith to her friends in high school. I know that many preachers' kids are a burden to their parents, but my daughter is a joy to her mother and me — well, at least most of the time!

Pastors' marriages are not immune to the everyday marital problems other Christian couples experience. Neither are they, as parents, immune to the everyday parenting problems other Christian parents experience. But the expectations for the pastor's family seem to be higher, the pressures more intense, and the private moments more rare.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their families?

- . They often worry about their spouses' well-being and happiness in the church.
- . Often a pastor's wife or husband will make personal sacrifices due to the spouse's responsibilities to the church.
- . They wish they had more time to spend with their spouse and children — without unnecessary interruptions.
- . A pastor's family often needs encouragement because they can sometimes feel alone in their work at the church.
- . Pastors are pleased when members remember and celebrate their family's birthdays and anniversaries.

- . They need time away from church responsibilities in order to strengthen their marriages and families and grow together in their spiritual relationship with God.
- . They're concerned about their children's spiritual life, upbringing in the church, and future.
- . They want the congregation to remember that the pastor and his wife (and the pastor's children) are human, not perfect. They're capable of making mistakes.
- . Some pastors need extra help and support because of difficult family situations.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Make a special effort to show appreciation for your pastor's wife — for the person she is and for the work she does in the home and church.
- . Include her in your circle of friends. Invite her to lunch, send her cards of encouragement, be available to assist when she needs help on a special project, etc. Let her know she is loved, admired, and deeply cared for.
- . Be careful not to criticize either the pastor or his wife. Know that everyone makes mistakes. Encourage them. Show gratitude for their help and counsel.
- . Allow your female pastor's husband to do those church jobs he is especially gifted to do. Be careful not to expect him to work at jobs he cannot do well, or doesn't necessarily want to do.
- . When your pastor and his family have scheduled private family time, interrupt them only in case of an emergency.

- Remember and celebrate their birthdays, anniversaries, and special days.
- Give your pastor's family the gift of a vacation together, as well as times of spiritual retreat (pastors' schools, conferences, etc.).
- Help them with their children in any way you can.
- In difficult situations, such as sickness, give your pastor's spouse extra support and practical help.
- Pray daily for each member of your pastor's family. Pray that God will strengthen the pastor's marriage.

CHAPTER 5: "I JUST WISH I COULD SUPPORT MY FAMILY"

The worker deserves his wages.

1 Timothy 5:18

HOW MUCH DO YOU PAY your pastor? Is it enough for him and his family to live on? Most pastors told me they made little money compared to the amount of education they had and the amount of work they did. And most admitted their paycheck was not nearly enough to support a family. Did you know that financial compensation is a constant stressor for many clergy families, and that though they rank in the top 10 percent of the population in terms of their education level, they rank 325th out of 432 occupations in terms of salary?^{[1](#)}

Some pastors minister full-time with few benefits, if any. While some churches take good care of their pastor and his family (in terms of adequate medical insurance coverage and retirement programs), others don't. Surveyed pastors wrote:

I wish my church understood the ins and outs of our financial struggles, how it affects our family, and how tough it is to stay focused on the work of ministry when you are struggling to make ends meet all the time.

I could use financial help from the church. Most people seem to think the pastor should spend 90 hours a week at church, but come up with his own way of supporting a family.

I'm really struggling financially!

I'm frustrated that my church froze my salary ten years ago. And although they have given me some additional benefits and bonuses, it's as if I'm only worth so much — no more than ten years ago obviously. While my pay is adequate for my needs, it's about \$10,000 less annually than the average pastor in this denomination in a similar size church.

I wish my church understood my true salary. Since my health insurance, social security, and retirement benefits are all included in the big picture, it looks like I make a big salary. My take-home salary amount is small and misleading on paper.

I wish my church remembered that when my insurance goes up, they need to adjust my salary. Also, my driving allowance needs to increase with the cost of living.

WHAT DRIVES THE PASTOR'S PAY SCALE

Research shows that the biggest single factor in determining any pastor's pay is the church's income.² When, for various reasons, membership dwindles, churches lose tithes. As one pastor put it:

When people aren't in a right fellowship with God, tithes tend to drop off the map.

Members leave churches for many reasons, including death, divorce, conflict, disinterest, a decrease in spiritual "temperature," and so on. When tithing members leave, the church's income decreases, and many times the church can't pay its pastor's salary or its regular bills. Some churches today are just a tithe away from permanently shutting their doors.

A pastor's denomination also has a great deal to do with the size of his paycheck. A new survey shows that senior pastors in the Presbyterian denomination have a higher average salary — \$78,000

plus housing/ parsonage — than those in other denominations. In the bottom of the salary range, were Baptist senior pastors, earning next to last with \$67,000.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this same survey found that the higher a pastor's education, the higher his salary. Most surprisingly, however, was its finding that female solo pastors earn more than their male counterparts.³

Many reasons keep the pastor's salary at a substandard level, especially in smaller churches. But how sad it is when the church *can* afford to pay the pastor more, but doesn't stop to consider the pastor's needs and expenses. Often the members of the church live at a much higher standard of living than their pastor — who may struggle to keep food on the table.

Two pastors told me they had approached their church and asked for more income.

I asked for financial help (e.g., a raise in income), and the church turned a deaf ear to my situation.

My church insists on paying me peanuts, and they require my family to live in their parsonage. When I asked them for more income, and told them I worried about my family financially due to upcoming retirement, they told me: 'God will take care of you when retirement time comes.'

THE PARSONAGE DILEMMA

Most pastors admitted they loathed having to live in the church-owned home — the parsonage. Why? Most ordained ministers can take advantage of an income tax law that enables their church to tax-shelter a portion of their paycheck. This makes annual income tax less, and it gives the pastor a unique opportunity (as well as more

money) to buy his own home. As a home owner, the pastor can build equity in his house. And when he retires, he can continue to live in his own home.

When the church furnishes the minister's house, the pastor has no choice where to live or the size (or the condition) of the house. He may have a big family, or be caring for aged parents, and they may need a larger home. Many parsonages are located next door to the church, and that can interfere with the family's privacy, planned work schedules, and the like. The pastor also gives up the benefit of home equity. And, when he leaves the church (or the church asks him to leave!), he must also leave the house. When he retires, he has no house to live in, and with housing costs rising, he might not be able to afford a home to retire in. Two pastors wrote about the parsonage dilemma:

My upcoming retirement presents me the problem of no home to live in.

At the income I make, and the rate I'm going, I won't have anywhere to live when I retire. I need to be able to start building up equity in my own home so that when retirement time comes, I'm not homeless.

Some churches provide parsonages, but then fail to maintain them. Often the pastor makes his own repairs, or pays (from his own pocket) for repairs and upkeep.

RETIREMENT CONCERNS

Retirement seemed to worry most of the pastors I surveyed, no matter what their age. Even the young pastors had concerns about future retirement needs — family needs that might not be met due to their present or future level of income.

Since I turned forty, I've begun thinking more about retirement. At times I'm concerned if there will be enough money invested to meet my wife's and my future needs.

As I near retirement, without a miracle there seems to be a bleak future for me and my wife.

I've not been able to save enough money to retire. Limited earnings through [my] ministry career has meant limited opportunity for saving for retirement.

We don't have much money to retire on, so I need to keep working. At seventy-two, it's hard to do the work — it's so physically draining.

Money is a huge area of concern. I am fifty-five years old, and when I consider the future, believe me, I'm glad I know that the Lord is faithful to provide, because my church's tithes and offerings are down. Wal-Mart, on the other hand, seems to be doing quite well!

I have tremendous financial problems due to health-care insurance and other necessary expenses. I'm going deeper and deeper into debt, and I'm so close to retirement.

Our financial future looks depressing since the church doesn't pay us enough to adequately prepare for retirement. I'm not sure what we'll do.

At forty-eight years old, I don't think I'll have enough money to retire, so this really scares and worries me.

I get very concerned from time to time about my personal financial planning for retirement as my current salary doesn't allow me to save for the future as I would like to do.

One pastor explained to me, at length, his unfortunate financial situation. I'm sure other pastors feel the same way.

I greatly fear coming to retirement with not enough savings or investments to make it through post-retirement. In seminary, I was so focused on studying and responding to God's call on my life, I didn't consider retirement to be a very important issue. And, with a beginning salary of \$75 a week with a Master's degree, and then \$125 a week with a doctorate degree, I couldn't save any money. In seminary, the issues of savings and investing and personal and family money management were never discussed — that I remember. I suppose my seminary professors, who were also being paid substandard salaries and making great sacrifices, hadn't been able to get on top of these important matters either — so the topic was never addressed.

Of course, to talk about money sounds rather “unspiritual,” but because there's the reluctance for prospective pastors, pastor search committees, and personnel committees to address, in responsible ways, salary/retirement/ insurance issues, it goes unaddressed, and the pastor and family suffer in silence. . . . One year, when I reached a particular age level, my family insurance increased by \$9,000 — for a family of four. When I got the news of the increase, I knew we couldn't pay our bills, so I updated my resume that night. I knew I'd have to leave the church. Fortunately, a couple of members on the personnel committee became sensitive to this, and they made adjustments in our insurance premium support. I'm now age fifty-five. I can't afford to move to another church even if I feel my present church needs a change in pastoral leadership. At this time of my life, with two children currently in college, I have the largest financial commitments in my life. As I age, I know my marketability is decreasing, but surely my experience is worth something! Most churches, however, are looking for younger pastors. So where do I serve between the ages of fifty-five and

sixty-five if I leave my present church? And how do I survive financially?

WHEN PASTORS' WIVES WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME

To meet monthly bills and financially survive the dilemma of small pastoral paychecks and rising family expenses, most pastors' wives must work outside the home. In fact, at least 70 percent of pastors' wives have careers outside the home.^{[4](#)}

When a pastor's wife works full-time outside the home to help supply needed family income, she is often still expected to work beside her husband in the church's ministry. With her housework duties, and with caretaking for her children, today's pastor's wife holds three full-time jobs! Not only do these jobs cause her physical and emotional exhaustion, but often she feels resentment, especially when her work hours are overwhelming and she stays too busy to spend time with her husband, children, extended family members, friends — or God!

THE CHILDREN PAY THE PRICE

Not only might pastors and pastors' wives experience resentment when they feel underpaid by their churches, but their children might also feel a certain bitterness toward the church and its members. As hard as it is to believe, some pastors told me they couldn't afford to send their children to their own church's camps and youth trips! Others said that because of low incomes, their children could take part in few of the community (outside the church) activities their friends enjoyed. One pastor was unable to afford the high tuition expenses of his own denomination's universities!

At the denominational university I wish my children could attend, the tuition costs are so astronomically high that no child

of the average pastor in our denomination could afford to attend. From the pulpit, I support our denomination's institutions of higher learning, as well as its state convention budgets, but the annual costs for attendance at their universities is beyond the salary that most of their pastors make. Even with scholarship money for children who are academically gifted or talented, the cost prohibits me from sending my children there.

A large number of pastors (especially those leading small churches) solve the financial dilemma by taking on additional employment. By working two jobs, they have more money to provide their children's needs, but also have less time to spend with their children. The trend toward bivocational pastors is growing in our culture. I heard from so many bivocational pastors, I've dedicated the next chapter totally to their (and their families') unique situation.

While lack of income presents many problems for the pastor and his family, clergy are quick to remind me that money is secondary (or not an issue at all!) when they answer God's call to the pulpit ministry and become pastors.

I do not pastor my church just for the money. I could make much more in a secular field with a lot fewer headaches. I, along with every God-called minister, serve the church because of God. In other words, we do it for him. If I were serving for the money, or even the people, I would have quit long ago.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their finances?

- Financial compensation for many clergy families is a chronic stressor.

- . While some pastors have adequate paychecks and benefits, many pastors struggle with inadequate incomes and few (if any) benefits.
- . A pastor's income depends on many factors (his denomination, his congregation's tithes, the size of his church, gender, etc.), most of which are out of his control.
- . Ministers are reluctant to talk with church leaders about personal financial needs.
- . Living in a church-owned home usually proves a financial disadvantage to the pastor and his family.
- . Most pastors worry about future retirement funds. Due to low incomes and lack of retirement benefits, many are financially unable to retire.
- . Most pastors' wives work outside the home for financial survival. In some cases, a husband's low income causes his wife resentment and additional workloads.
- . When pastors are underpaid, their children often suffer, are sometimes left out of enriching activities, and might feel bitterness toward the church.
- . A pastor's first priority is to answer God's call to ministry. Money proves a secondary issue.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Investigate the amount your church pays your pastor, as well as benefits provided him (medical insurance, retirement benefits, housing, etc.).

- . If your church pays him a substandard salary with limited benefits, talk to church elders, deacons, or other proper church leadership members or committees. Ask them to review your pastor's financial package, and, if possible, to consider increasing his income and benefits.
- . As a church, make it possible for your pastor to meet and talk with a professional financial planner about his personal money management skills, retirement needs, etc.
- . If your church provides a house for your pastor's family, make sure the church also provides money and workers for necessary repairs and upkeep.
- . Be faithful to your own pledge or tithe promises to the church.
- . If you have adequate financial resources, consider regular or occasional gifts of money to your pastor and his family.
- . Talk with your pastor confidentially (if he will agree to talk with you) about his financial needs, and find out areas where the church or individuals can help him.
- . Be sensitive to the time and money limitations of the employed pastor's wife. Volunteer to help her with church/home projects so she might spend more time with God, her husband, and her children.
- . Be sensitive to the needs of the pastor's children. Find out their unmet needs and, if possible, help to financially meet those needs.
- . Child care is expensive. If your pastor and wife have small children, offer to babysit so they can enjoy a dinner out or a quiet evening at home together.⁵

- For birthdays, anniversaries, and other occasions, give (as a church or individually) your pastor and his family gift cards/certificates to their favorite stores, dinners in nice restaurants, and include them (cost-free) in your own family vacations and recreational outings.

SECTION 2: YOUR PASTOR AND THE CHURCH

CHAPTER 6: “THIS BIVOCATIONAL THING ISN’T EASY”

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23 – 24

PASTOR “RANDALL” WORKS FORTY HOURS a week as a lab technician at the local hospital. He also pastors a small church in his community. Pastor Randall, like Jesus (the carpenter) and the apostle Paul (the tentmaker), combines secular work with ecclesiastical work. We refer to ministers like Pastor Randall as bivocational pastors (sometimes called “bi-vos” or “entrepreneurial” ministers).

The designations of bivocational, part-time, and volunteer refer to what the church pays a pastor, not to the tremendous ministry responsibilities they assume in the local church. In fact, a better distinction between the full-time pastor and the bivocational pastor is this: Both men are full-time pastors, however one pastor is fully funded for his full-time work while the other (the bivocational pastor) is only partially funded for his full-time work. (I have yet to meet a church pastor who is truly *part-time*!)

Bivocational pastors have the same concerns as fully funded church pastors. But, due to their additional job outside the church, they experience different types of problems.

From the hundreds of pastors who responded to my survey, I was surprised that so many worked as bi-vos. They ranged in age from young to old, represented many denominations, and worked a

variety of secular jobs, including as schoolteachers, factory workers, hospital employees, air traffic controllers, business consultants, and office personnel.

The one thing they held in common? Due to God's call to church ministry — and bivocational ministry in particular — they shepherded a group of Christians, leading them to Christ, and growing and nurturing them in the Christian faith.

Bi-vos make up a large percentage of pastors today. In mainline Protestant denominations (such as Lutheran and Presbyterian), 30 percent of the churches depend on bivocational pastors. With their congregations shrinking — especially in rural areas — these churches can no longer fully fund their pastors. In the Southern Baptist denomination, at least 50 percent of churches are led by bi-vos. Start-up churches in urban areas — serving ethnic and immigrant congregations — have also accounted for growth of bi-vos in recent years.

In early American history, bivocational pastors were the norm. Pastors and evangelists worked wage-earning jobs — they farmed, made soap, sewed shoes, taught school — and at the same time, they ministered to small congregations.

Economics play a large part in the recent resurgence of bivocational pastors. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, a 2006 study by the Southern Baptist Convention discovered the annual cost of supporting a bivocational pastor was \$17,385, compared with almost \$60,000 in pay and benefits for a full-time minister.^{[1](#)} Some small churches simply can't afford to fully fund a pastor's salary and benefits.

THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING BIVOCATIONAL

About half of the bivocational pastors told me they enjoyed their church position status. In their secular job, they had occasions to minister to scores of people outside the walls of the church. Working beside the unchurched each day also gave them a better understanding of society. They could see firsthand current trends in societal attitudes and changes. Secular jobs gave them opportunities to build relationships with people who never came to church. Friendships with coworkers became invitations to visit the church.

The bivocational pastors worried less about finances because their major source of income came from a secular employer, not the church. . Their salaries didn't depend on church members' tithes. If the church paid little salary, the bi-vo had another steady paycheck to keep a roof over his family's heads and food on the table. And if, for some reason, the church gave him an unexpected pink slip and asked him to leave, he still had a house for his family to live in and his monthly mortgage payments covered by his secular job.

I serve as a bivocational pastor in a small country church — praise the Lord for this ministry! God is blessing despite the growling of the few. The majority of the congregation, and especially new Christians, are excited about their growing spiritual maturity and new ministry opportunities. It's this type of excitement that keeps us pastors from burnout. God is good, and we serve an awesome Savior.

Not depending on the church for his total income, one pastor believed he related better to his church members and had more freedom to preach.

I work because God told me to work. God was clear that he wanted me free to preach the truth, and not worry about having to please people in order to get (and keep) a good salary or get a big church. The church doesn't have to pay me, and I don't worry too much about raising money.

But with all these advantages of bivocational church work, pastors told me they faced some disadvantages too.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF BIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

One disadvantage of bivocational ministry comes from peoples' perceptions of bivocational pastors. Some consider the bi-vo position inferior in some way to that of the fully funded pastor (as if the pastor wasn't able to get a larger church or a fully funded church position). But that's a myth. In the largest Protestant denomination — the Southern Baptist — most churches are small churches. In fact, only 1 percent of Southern Baptist churches average more than one thousand in Sunday school and 75 percent of churches average less than a hundred members.

Mitch Martin, bivocational ministry specialist for LifeWay Christian Resources, states: "Smaller-membership churches are not only the backbone of the Southern Baptist Convention, they are the heart and soul, arms, legs, and feet of our work!"²

So, while bivocational pastors lead churches that might otherwise have no pastor due to limited funds (and God bless them for it!), the disadvantages of their situation are undeniable.

Bi-Vo Pastors Have Overly-Demanding Work Schedules

Working two jobs can often overwhelm the bi-vo pastor.

Being a bivocational pastor is very demanding, but I love doing it. I truly believe that it's what God has called me to do, and I'm where he wants me to be. Money isn't important to me. What I make just barely covers the expenses at times, but I love sharing Jesus with people and helping them. I love working with

youth who are hurting and need to be loved and accepted like they are.

My two jobs are demanding. I wish I had more help on church projects from church members. I get so frustrated when people say they don't have time to help with something at the church because they're too busy. Most just can't imagine how busy I stay.

I am a bivocational pastor, and I take seminary classes as well. Many of the membership have more time than I do, yet they ask and expect me to do many of the small things that need to be done. This is very frustrating to me.

It's very difficult to pastor bivocationally. I have to do all my study and sermon preparation at night. I also feel I don't get to really pastor a congregation like a full-time pastor can.

My biggest concern is trying to do everything that is required of me by both jobs.

To have the church support and appreciate you, and to know they understand the struggles you have, and some of the needs of you and your family, would be so great.

Being a bivocational pastor is very, very challenging!

Bi-Vo Pastors Have a Lack of Time — Period

Most church pastors list "lack of time" as a constant problem, but the bivocational minister has the added responsibility of another workplace. Time is often extremely limited for these pastors.

I'm a full-time CPA in a public accounting practice, and I can't provide the needed amount of pastoral care that even a small congregation deserves. Time just doesn't allow it! I've

often wondered if I should resign, but often come to the conclusion that — since they can't support a full-time pastor — at least they have someone who can follow up with them by phone, if not in person.

Many times I don't have the time I need to be the pastor I'm called to be. As a bivocational pastor, I work a fifty-hour-a-week job and travel one hour a day to and from the job. That's sixty hours-a-week! After I spend time in study, and make a few pastoral visits, I have very little time for my family. In fact, that seems to be the thing that causes the most problems in my home — my time spent away from my wife and kids.

I have huge time pressures. I'm always trying to find the time to visit, counsel members, and preach. The congregation expects me to make all the hospital visits, counsel them on a regular basis, and deliver a new, exciting, and dynamic sermon every Sunday. If I ask for time off (I get four Sundays per year), then I know I'll need to be able to come back if anything happens to a church member or their family/friends, or if any church activity comes up. I really enjoy doing these activities, and I thank God for my calling to minister. But people don't understand that I also have a full-time secular job that can be very demanding on my time.

I need more personal and family time, and a better balanced life.

Both the church and the secular job usually require full-time work.

Even though I'm employed part-time at the church, congregational expectations are *full-time*.

It's semantics, I know, but I'm not a part-time anything. I'm a bivo-cational full-time pastor, and a full-time human resources professional at a 2,500-employee multicampus manufacturing facility. I give the same amount of time (as a full-time pastor) for

sermon preparation, visitation, church administration, funerals, marriages, etc. Pastor counseling is certainly full-time. As you can tell, when church members refer to me as the 'part-time' pastor, it frustrates me. I work more than seventy hours a week!

Bi-Vo Pastors Aren't Always Cut Any Slack

Secular employers often fail to understand the time a bivocational pastor needs to lead his church. The secular job may require the pastor to work overtime hours or on the weekends. Some employers make it harder for the pastor to fulfill his pastoral responsibilities.

Many times, the primary, secular employer isn't going to be understanding enough, and the church isn't going to be understanding enough, about the time demands of the pastor. He simply cannot be at two places at once, and both employers expect to be his first priority.

BECOMING FULLY FUNDED AT THE CHURCH

Several pastors told me they hoped one day to leave their secular jobs and become fully funded by their churches.

I think it would be better if I were full-time. Maybe God will give me the opportunity.

I could do more if I were full-time. However, I trust that God knows better than I do, and I like what I'm doing. So I'll keep working bivocationally until God tells me to quit my second job.

I would love to be in full-time ministry. I feel 'guilt' (self-induced, however) when I can't visit or counsel due to the demands of my secular job. I wish I had more time to be a pastor, to build better relationships with my members, and spend more time in evangelism. It would also be nice to have

more time for sermon preparation and Bible study. The misconception that some members have is that the bivocational pastor works only three hours a week for the church, and that they are paying the pastor too much. I work hard to minister to our membership. When I hear negative comments about how the 'old former preacher' worked for \$50 a week, it gets old quick. It's not about the money, but God does expect that those in his service be adequately compensated without having to feel guilty.

IT DOESN'T STOP THERE

Both fully funded and partially funded (bivocational) pastors feel frustrated when church attendance is down.

Being the bivocational pastor of a very small congregation, it's discouraging when people will not attend regularly. When you only have a few to start with, those services that are lacking in attendance tend to make you feel like a failure.

At least one pastor told me he worried about the continued vitality of his bivocational church.

As a bivocational minister in a rural area, I fear our church getting stagnant and irrelevant.

RESOURCES BI-VOS NEED

Bivocational pastors need encouragement and support, as many indicated to me.

I need encouragement in both my spiritual walk and my emotional health. Many times bivocational pastors really don't

have a pastor, so we depend upon someone else to provide that spiritual encouragement outside the congregation.

The Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers' Association is one of several agencies that provides both encouragement and support to these pastors. The mission of the association is doing whatever it takes to "encourage, promote, and serve bivocational and smaller membership churches, ministers, and families in Christ's kingdom service within local congregations and communities, the Southern Baptist family, and the larger Christian movement."³

Some individual states also provide support and resources for their bivocational pastors. For example, more than half of Alabama's Baptist churches are served by bivocational pastors. Realizing these pastors have special needs, Samford University, the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and a Lilly Endowment grant developed the Pastoral Sustenance Network. This network brings bivocational pastors together in well-organized, structured monthly group meetings to study, pray, and support each other as they deal with difficult ministry and family issues. The Alabama program has been so successful, program organizers are planning to expand it.⁴

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do bivocational pastors wish church members knew?

- . The role of a bivocational pastor is very demanding, challenging, and exhausting. It is also very rewarding.
- . Bivocational pastors are not "part-time" pastors! They are full-time pastors who are partially funded by the church.
- . The bivocational minister is as significant and valid as the fully funded church minister.

- . While some pastors want to pastor in fully funded positions, other pastors prefer working bivocationally — both inside and outside the church.
- . For the pastor who holds two full-time jobs, time is limited. He often must sacrifice personal time, needed rest, and time with his family.
- . The bivocational pastor may not always be able to leave his secular job at a moment's notice for a church-related situation or meeting.
- . Some secular employers understand and cooperate when pastoral needs call the bivocational pastor away from his full-time job, but some don't.

What You Can Do to Help Your Bivocational Pastor

- . With your pastor's permission, organize a prayer support group — that meets regularly — to pray for your pastor's specific needs as he strives to work both jobs.
- . Be sensitive to his personal time needs as well as to his family time needs.
- . Your pastor must meet the demands of two full-time jobs. (*Three jobs* when you consider his roles as husband and father!) As a member of the church, be available and willing to help your pastor with the work of the church. In the bivocational church, members must be involved in the ministry.
- . Contact your pastor at his secular job only in case of a legitimate emergency.
- . Encourage your pastor to seek fellowship with other bivocational pastors in your community, city, state, or denomination.

- Be a prayer support to your pastor's wife. Whenever possible, offer to help her with church activities, house work, child care, and other areas in which she might need assistance.

CHAPTER 7: “IF YOU KNEW HOW FRUSTRATING MINISTRY CAN BE”

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13 – 14

I WASN'T PREPARED FOR THE avalanche of responses I received from pastors about their frustrations with church ministry! They could have filled an entire book on their own! Pastors wrote profusely (their aggravations) on the fronts, backs, and sides of the survey sheets. When they filled up those spaces, they wrote the rest of their exasperations on the insides (and outsides) of the envelopes!

I think I opened up a can of worms, so to speak, when I asked pastors to list their church-related frustrations — or at least I hit a great big weary nerve!

SO MANY FRUSTRATIONS

Hundreds of pastors told me, anonymously and at length, the things that interfered with church ministries, knotted their stomachs, hurt their feelings, destroyed church fellowship, and kept them from essential ministry work and requests. They listed irritations that ranged from unsupportive staff and demanding deacons to lack of toilet paper in washrooms, from . frustrating emails to church members criticizing them ten minutes before the Sunday morning sermon — and everything in between!

Before we dive into these frustrations, however, I'd like to prepare you for what you'll be reading. Pastors were often very vocal when

writing about their frustrations, and some of their comments might shock you. Some of them, I believe, just wanted to vent — and that's okay.

Pastors have few — if any — avenues in which to complain and vent as they have here, and I purposely asked them to list their frustrations in order to give them just such an outlet. I trust that their venting, however “unpastor-like” it may seem at first, will be helpful to you in some way. Pastors are indeed human — just like the rest of us!

I also believe that, perhaps, some of the surveyed pastors expressed their frustrations before they had their morning coffee, or after they argued with their teenage son about the fresh dent in the family car fender, or at a time in ministry when they were at their wit's end and ready to throw up their hands and quit. Each frustration, however, possesses its own grain of truth, and what most frustrates today's pastor is worth spelling out and looking at closely within our own hearts and lives and churches.

Why did I ask pastors to tell me specifically what bothers them? Because the whole purpose of this book is to help church members better understand their pastors and to help them better minister to the needs of the church. Some of the frustrations the pastors listed surprised me, despite my personal and intimate knowledge of ministry life.

These pastors told me things I had never before thought about. Through their comments, I learned much about how to help my *own* pastor in various ways. I hope their candid answers — each told to me with a loving heart and a genuine desire to better do God's work in the church — will also help you as you love, affirm, encourage, and work with your pastor to honor Christ through the church.

We've touched on some of these frustrations and disappointments in previous chapters, but they warrant looking at in more detail.

Frustration #1: Tied Hands

Pastors are held responsible for what goes on inside their church walls. Yet sometimes church leaders and others limit their authority and position.

I'm frustrated by church leaders who don't consider my opinion very often. It's as if I'm irrelevant to certain church decisions, even the decisions that affect me!

Leaders (especially demanding deacons) don't listen when I ask for help. As my congregation's leaders age, they move from "helping servants" to "demanding servees."

I wish church members knew how frustrating it is to want to move the church forward only to be met with opposition every step of the way because of tradition or personal preferences.

It frustrates me that my church won't allow me to be the primary one to choose church staff. I would have been kept out of the process several times, but I found out when the search team was meeting, and then included myself in the process (against the chairman's wishes). In one of my churches, I objected to calling a particular staff member. I was overruled and ignored. The church called the person, and the problems I had predicted took place. I had to deal with them, and as a result, I came under fire and eventually ended up leaving the church. I wish the church understood that the training and experience I bring to the church is significant. Just because some church members know how to run a secular business doesn't mean they understand how a church functions.

At least three pastors felt like the church had tied their hands — an interesting symbolic expression and visual image denoting helplessness, defenselessness, and vulnerability.

Even though I was called by God and the church to lead them, every time I attempt to lead, they tie my hands.

My hands are totally tied at this church. I have little or no say about the personnel in this church (hiring or firing), and about other pertinent matters I need to have a voice in.

When a difficult and delicate situation arises concerning the integrity, character, or morality of a staff or church member, my hands are tied. I simply cannot give all the details of the situation. Therefore, most of the time, I come off looking like a church dictator or an uncaring leader. Many times I must protect the guilty party, and then I often become the one with my integrity on the line, because I've had to deal with a popular staff member, etc.

Frustration #2: Too Busy Being a Pastor to Be a Minister

We've already looked at how the demands of ministry keep pastors from spending time with God, their spouse, and their children. Here we see how ministry's time pressures can keep pastors from completing their ministry objectives, preparing sermons, and having an ideal level of involvement with church members.

Pastors complained about this lack of time with their congregation:

I have too little time for adequate involvement with my membership.

I wish I had more time to sit down with people and just visit and talk. Over the years, my ministry has grown tremendously. Overseeing such a large ministry costs me in other areas. But I greatly miss not having more fellowship time with my members.

With a growing congregation, it is impossible to spend personal time with as many as I would like to — especially with

those who feel the need for my time.

They also wrote about feeling “unfinished” and stretched in ministry projects and visitation.

I struggle with not having enough time in ministry. The church tasks are never done! There is never a sense of completion in the ministry. When I worked in factories (before I became a pastor), I could finish a product and send it on. With ministry, however, people are always in process.

Time is pressured. I wish my deacons knew that it doesn't help for a deacon to visit church members with me. That saves no time. What does help is for a deacon and me to divide up the number of people who need to be visited. Deacons: 'Please keep me freed up and available for the serious hospital visitation.'

I find managing volunteer staff too time-consuming and difficult. We hardly ever complete the tasks.

Frustration #3: Too Busy Being a Pastor to Be a Preacher

Pastors told me they desperately needed more time to study, write, and prepare their sermons.

I yearn to be involved in passionate and deep study and sermon preparation on wonderful subjects like systematic theology, textual criticism, church history, and Christian ethics. But time doesn't permit it. Instead, I grab light snatches of time at odd moments throughout the week to prepare my sermons. I use my day off at home for in-depth study and to complete sermon preparation. That eats into my ministry time! But how am I going to have anything of depth to say on Sunday morning if I don't? I have to isolate myself to get sermons completed. I've found I can't study at church — too many trivial and petty

interruptions. People come to my office and remark: 'If you aren't busy right now, could you please. . . .' I want to tell them: 'I am always busy! Sloth is not a part of my professional make-up! From morning to evening, I am busily involved in challenging things. There's hardly a letdown.' Even church secretaries don't have a clue what it takes to be a pastor!

The call to preach, and the responsibility associated with being God's mouthpiece, is often overwhelming. Not having ample time to prepare sermons is frustrating and disheartening.

I want our church worship services, my sermons, children's ministries, and the like to be exciting and inviting. But I only have so many hours in the day to brainstorm the next great idea.

I wish church members would respect my time. I don't ask for a lot of time, and I certainly try to maintain an 'open door' policy. But I need time to prepare sermons — three different messages per week. I've tried to communicate through the bulletin and announcements that I want to reserve my mornings for study, so I'm available instead any time in the afternoon or evenings. But, in the mornings, I still have people come by my church office just to make small talk. Sometimes I must leave my church study, take my laptop and books, and go to a hotel that specializes in business travelers, so I can use their private complimentary offices to study and prepare sermons.

Frustration #4: It's Always the Pastor's Fault

Pastors also complained that they received unwarranted and frequent blame when things went awry.

If something doesn't work within a program or a service, church members and staff are too quick to say it's the pastor's fault.

Many people in my church are unwilling to talk with me about their personal problems, and are unwilling to have my wife and me visit them in their homes to minister to them. But they are all too quick to criticize us when something happens and we aren't there.

I'm discouraged by the superficial ways that leaders say they want to 'grow the church.' I tell them that's God's business; that we are to plant the seed and water it. But they want to do something 'human' to grow the church. And, although they don't say it out loud, I know they think it's my fault that we are not exactly busting out at the seams. Since I'm opposed to putting hymns and sermons on the wall — using computerized systems — I am seen as unprogressive.

Conflict and criticism discourage me. Why can't members lay aside their own personal agendas for the good of the whole church? Why can't they stop blaming me, start forgiving me (and one another), and be reconciled following conflict?

Frustration #5: Committees, Committees, Committees

One of my professors of pastoral care at Southern Seminary, the late Dr. Wayne Oates, used to say: "A camel is really a horse that a committee put together!" Most of the surveyed pastors agreed! Some said committee work greatly frustrated them.

I don't like doing ministry through committees. I cannot find a place in God's Word where it says we have to have a committee or deacon board.

The personnel committee in my church doesn't function well at all. It actually does more harm than good! My staff members give little effort to their jobs, and I have little recourse because the personnel committee in my church does not know how to do accurate job performance evaluations.

Church committees and politics tie my hands as pastor and keep me from doing the work of the kingdom. There are just too many committees and too many 'church bosses'!

Frustration #6: Difficult Deacons and Stubborn Elders

I once heard about a child who overheard his pastor-dad talking about the deacons in his church. "Daddy," he asked, "aren't 'deacons' those things that Jesus went around casting out?"

Some of the pastors who answered my survey might agree! While deacons and elders are usually wonderful and helpful church leaders, sometimes even they can frustrate the pastor.

Deacons who want to run the church and micromanage its leaders steal my joy and make my ministry a burden to me.

I have a few dedicated deacons who truly help minister to our people. But it frustrates me when other deacons want to manage more than minister. I have deacons who only want to show up at monthly meetings to micromanage the affairs of the church, rather than be out ministering to the people.

The lack of understanding by deacons — about my biblical role as pastor — hinders me from fully using the gifts God has given me.

Most of the deacons in our church are wonderful, and they serve with joy in many ways. But we have one or two who seldom support anything we do in the church.

I suffer the lack of support from my church elders, as well as their inability to understand that the church can't fully endorse or get behind everything they are personally passionate about. The church has a mission and vision, and we must stay centered on that.

Frustration #6: Staff Politics and Conflicting Visions

I've watched pastors leave their churches due to problems and frustrations with church staff members and church leaders.

The church staff and other leaders do not understand my pastoral role.

I have difficult staff relations in my church.

I'm frustrated by the practical nonexistence of the practice of prayer on the part of my church leadership and staff.

I'm tired of my church's 'numbers games.' My church staff and leaders want to measure everything by numbers! Some of them say: 'Do whatever it takes to draw a crowd,' no matter whether it honors Jesus or not.

My church leaders (and deacons) believe that ministry isn't 'worth doing' unless it significantly 'ups' the number of people in the pews, or jacks up the amount of money in the offering plate.

Some of the leaders of my church, elected or not, don't have the 'big ministry picture' in mind, and they seek to control the rest of us out of fear or pride. Thus, they derail us from having our eyes on what God wants to accomplish.

Frustration #7: A Bevy of Unnecessary Programs

One pastor wrote that he'd "had it" with church programs! (No doubt, he filled out his survey while driving to yet another church program one Sunday afternoon.)

I hate the program-driven expectations of local church ministry. I feel we're losing the war with our current 'score card' mentality about church life. Deacons' meetings, long-range

planning committees, developing mission statements to adorn a bulletin cover, developing various worship venues — Programs! Programs! Programs! These are the routines of my ministry. We seem to be busy doing all these things fifty weeks a year, while our lost neighbors are enjoying their lives. When I drive to church on Sunday afternoons (not particularly excited about the work that awaits me at church), I see dads out playing with their kids, moms talking with each other, young adults jogging and riding bikes, couples connecting in coffee shops, people hiking and just resting after a hectic work week. My duty, however, is to meet with about 10 percent of the active church membership for a discipleship program. In the program's class, we again cover the basics of 'how to follow Jesus'—something church members should have embraced thirty years ago! The truth is, Jesus isn't under our steeples on Sunday nights anymore. He's out playing with the kids too!

JESUS HAD FRUSTRATIONS TOO!

Lest we think that only today's pastors face ministry irritations, let's stop a moment and look at the frustrations Jesus himself endured during his earthly ministry.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we learn that Jesus constantly had to deal with the hostilities and irritations of the Pharisees who accused him of blaspheming and eating with sinners. They called him a glutton and a drunkard, even "Beelzebub, the prince of demons." They tried to arrest him, they tortured him, and — with the help of the Romans — they finally killed him.^{[1](#)}

Even Jesus' disciples, time and time again, frustrated him. They failed to understand his parables. "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them in Matthew 15:15. And, as they grew faithless and frightened in the storm-battered boat, he asked: "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" (8:26).

Their potential to discourage him didn't end there. They forgot to bring needed food on their journeys (16:5); believed Jesus to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another one of the prophets (16:14); and even tried to prevent the crucifixion — at which point he rebuked them saying: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me” (16:22 – 23).

Jesus' disciples had a list of shortcomings a mile long:²

- . They didn't understand him.
- . They often lacked faith in him.
- . They were often confused about his identity.
- . They often failed to do what he asked.
- . They said stupid things in supernatural situations.
- . They argued over which one of them was greatest.
- . They tried to keep children away from Jesus.
- . They had selfish, interfering mothers.
- . They betrayed him.
- . They slept while he prayed.
- . They ran away when he faced crucifixion.

God's chosen people, Jesus' listeners and followers — which we might compare to church members today — also tested his patience. “O unbelieving and perverse generation,” he said to them in frustration, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?” (Matthew 17:14 – 17). They set up Wal-Mart in the temple, buying and selling merchandise in a holy place; they

frequently failed to thank him or appreciate his healing ministry to them; they rejected his teachings; deserted him and his ministry; and called him a deceiver. They even declined his offer of salvation, but in what was perhaps their most baffling move, shouted “Hosanna” one day and “Crucify him!” the next.³

Of course, as God’s own Son, Jesus may be the most important example of a frustrated and mistreated prophet, but he is not the only one in Scripture. John the Baptist ended up in prison; was accused of having a demon; had a crisis of faith, asking Jesus if he was indeed the one who was to come or if they should “expect someone else”; and was ultimately martyred, his head chopped off at the whim of a young girl.⁴

Throughout the early church and throughout history, those who proclaimed Christ — pastors, preachers, missionaries, and, of course, all kinds of Christians — have dealt with great frustrations, heartbreaking disappointments, poverty, pain, persecution, and even violent death. It often seems that these things just come with the job of ministry!

Frustration #8: Impossible Expectations

Some pastoral expectations are necessary. Pastors are expected and required to preach, teach, and care for God’s people — that’s what a pastor is meant to do. But sometimes church members’ expectations can be too demanding or unrealistic. Pastors told me:

Some of the older people in my church think I should come by to see them every week. There’s no way I can do that and still prepare three sermons each week, and do the myriad of other duties I must do.

It makes me feel more like a ‘hireling’ than a pastor when church members have so many unrealistic expectations of me.

Even when a large church like mine has a staff to help members, too many church members expect the pastor to be there when they need him. It doesn't matter if another staff member comes to them or not. They want the pastor. That's so unrealistic, especially as the church grows larger.

Every week I hear some complaint from a church member about the pastor not visiting his church members. Most of the complaints come from people who have too much time on their hands. I wish those people would get busy volunteering their time and talents to help someone else through the church, or even through a community organization. Once again, the focus in the pew is often self-centered. With the crunch of time constraints I face weekly, I have made visiting families who are in crisis a priority in my ministry. Beyond that, I don't have time to sit and chat about politics or football or the weather. I am grateful that the deacons in our church have accepted the responsibility for pastoral care. That takes a load off me. I recommend every church adopt such a ministry model.

The church has an expectation that the pastor needs to fix everything that is wrong (or needed) in the church. For example, when the washrooms have no toilet paper, members come to me to make sure the washrooms are fully supplied — instead of getting the supplies themselves. Pastors can't do everything!

I wish my church members understood that I'm only one person, and I'm human! I don't have all the answers, and I struggle with much of the same stuff in life they struggle with each day.

Frustration #9: There's Only One Senior Pastor

When pastors complain about too many unrealistic expectations from their church members, they often mean that shepherding a flock of people, and trying to meet all their needs, is just too much

work for one person to do. They quickly become aware of their own human limitations.

I serve a congregation in the midst of a five-thousand-member resident senior community. Ninety-eight percent are retired, and many are well-advanced in age. I really struggle keeping up with the needs of folks. The need for care is huge.

I have over eight hundred people on our church roll that I try to minister to with limited staff and few financial resources.

The church always demands I give more time to ministry than is physically possible for any one person to do. Everyone in the church constantly tells me: 'Take time for your family!' But then they say: 'Pastor, I have this thing I need for you to do.' How can I do it all?

Too often the church membership only sees the needs inside the church. They don't notice the needs outside the church walls. Even when they do see the needs, too often they do nothing about it, and say 'I don't know what to do.' All they have to do is something! So often they expect the pastor to do all the outreach and visitation.

Frustration #10: No One to Lend a Hand

Often, when a pastor admits he is overwhelmed by too many unrealistic expectations and too many ministry demands for one person, he is asking for help! Most said they needed more well-trained, committed, hard-working staff, as well as more supportive deacons, Sunday school teachers, and volunteers.

I lack support from my congregation. I don't want to have to do more than I already do, and if church members don't support me and our church ministry, it will be impossible to be an effective pastor.

I have huge clerical demands and responsibilities each week and month, and little secretarial help. I also need help with administration.

I'm very concerned about the area of church finances. With all the legal issues and IRS and state regulations, I need someone with the necessary knowledge and willingness to properly manage our finances. I often attend training classes and seminars held by the state and local denominational associations. But I need church members and leaders to take over this responsibility.

My church suffers from the hired holy man syndrome! They believe the church work is the exclusive domain of the pastor because that's what we pay him for! I need some urgent help here!

Quite frankly, I am a pastor, not a financial planner. I struggle in the area of church finances, and must rely on other gifted, godly people to take the lead. We need more qualified people who will volunteer to help us.

I need urgent help in discipleship training!

My job as pastor is to equip the church members, not to do the ministry of the church for them. There's just too much to do for one pastor — I need help!

I need [volunteers] to help us do ministry, hospital visits, and lead small groups. I also need more training in counseling people, as I do it a lot as a pastor and feel undertrained.

The order of my desk does not reflect the order of my mind! I'm thankful for my highly organized secretary!

Too many times, I've been brought into a church in decline and told to grow it. Then everyone stands back and leaves it all

up to me. I bust my tail trying to do what the search committee has asked me to do, and meanwhile church member support ranges from lukewarm apathy to outright hostility.

I need help in organizing my day, week, and month. I have tried to keep a calendar or planner, but there always seem to be those things I don't anticipate that come up and require time.

PET PEEVES OF THE PASTOR

Before ending this chapter, let's look at a few miscellaneous pet peeves the surveyed pastors wished their church members knew about.

Before the Sermon

Several pastors wanted me to tell members that, in those moments preceding the worship services, pastors need to prayerfully and thoughtfully concentrate on their sermon as well as the upcoming service.

On Sunday morning, after I have prepared the sermon, and am prayerfully waiting for the Holy Spirit to guide me, on too many occasions a church member will approach me with trivial issues that could wait until after the service ends. Please be respectful of my time before going to the pulpit.

I'm most frustrated by the times church members seem to ignore the kingdom of God in order to bring up a secondary issue, especially when it is ten minutes before the worship service. It's as much an issue of timing as anything else.

I'm discouraged when people come up right before the worship service with a negative comment or criticism. It's simply the wrong time to express a negative comment.

I wish church members knew that the least effective time to express criticism is on Sunday morning prior to the services, and I wish church members realized that Saturdays are often the most stressful time of the week for the pastor as he prepares emotionally and spiritually for Sunday.

After the Sermon

For many pastors, the time following their sermons is as sensitive as the time preceding it.

I feel frustrated when people give me vague comments about the sermon I just preached (such as ‘good message’). I’d much rather hear specifically what was good or touching or moving about it.

Their Email In-box

While email can be a good thing, one pastor emailed me about his frustration with it.

Email is the locust of modern-day ministry! It has given voice to a whole generation who feels an entitlement to say things in a way that, twenty or thirty years ago, no one would have ever dreamed of saying or expressing to their pastor. For example, I received a lengthy email after a sermon on the book of Revelation. The email contained over twenty pre-millennial dispensational arguments — which I felt compelled to answer and copy, since the email had also been copied to a long list of church leaders. After I spent hours writing a reply, the family left the church anyway. (So much for my night with my family!) Unfortunately, through email, the complainer, the church antagonist, the whiners, etc., all have instant access to the pastor, and each expects a thoughtful reply regardless of what may be on the pastor’s ‘to-do’ list that day.

Trivial Pursuits

When pastors see Christ's Great Commission as their primary vision, it's frustrating when not all the church members share that vision. Sometimes the insignificant can seem more important than the Commission!

It's so hard to deal with petty things among the membership, and those petty things take so much important ministry time!

People jeopardize the most important work in the world (carrying out the Great Commission) for the most trivial reasons.

Petty church conflicts and issues keep us from executing the mission Christ has given us in his Word.

What frustrates me? Seeing church members spend more time for uneternal things than for eternal ones.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their ministry frustrations?

- . Like most people, they also often deal with frustrations in their vocation.
- . Their frustrations reflect the everyday job of working directly with people in and outside the church. It does not, however, negate or contradict their deep love for their church members.
- . Pastors are most frustrated when their role as pastor is limited, ignored, or overruled. They can feel as if their hands are tied and their leadership is not valued.

- . They work hard at their vocation, yet are often frustrated because they don't have more time to give God's people and the study of God's Word.
- . Congregational blame discourages them, especially when expectations are unrealistic or time pressures prevent accomplishing a task or goal.
- . Undependable church leaders, disagreeable deacons, unnecessary committee meetings, and those who try to micromanage church affairs lead to ministry time spent unprofitably and with no eternal results.
- . The success of a pastor's ministry shouldn't be measured in numbers.
- . Pastors can't accomplish the work of ministry all by themselves. They need help from the congregation to meet expectations and goals.
- . Even though he's a minister called by God, he too has a long list of pet peeves that irritates him.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Respect your pastor's call from God and his role as shepherd/leader of the congregation.
- . Respect your pastor's time. Know that he stays busy. Enlist his help only when you must.
- . Be careful not to criticize or blame him when goals are unaccomplished or something goes wrong in the church.

. Be dependable, agreeable, and encouraging toward your pastor. Keep committee meetings and other church events on their appointed time schedules. Rethink priorities in the church. Labor hard for those things that are profitable and eternal.

. Know that church growth comes from God, and not necessarily your pastor. Measure your pastor's ministry in souls accepting salvation through Christ, your congregation's spiritual growth, and your church's ministry and outreach to people — not by the number of bodies in the pews.

. Help your pastor minister effectively in areas he might be weak or untrained. Offer your help, but allow him to choose to accept it.

. Be careful not to add to his list of pet peeves!

. Untie his hands (if they've been bound)!

CHAPTER 8: “SOMETIMES I’M OVERWHELMED WITH ANXIETY”

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13 NKJV

WHILE FRUSTRATIONS (the topic of chapter 7) irritate the pastor and interfere with church ministry, fear can disable the pastor and render him powerless to do anything.

There are two kinds of fear: healthy fear and unhealthy fear. Healthy fear helps us survive so we can respond to God’s calling and purpose for our life. Unhealthy fear deters us from God’s work, robs us of joy, and keeps us from living life or ministering to others as fully as Jesus intends. Healthy fear is God’s gift to encourage us. Unhealthy fear is Satan’s tool to *discourage* us. It is that unhealthy fear and anxiety (a generalized sense of weakness, helplessness, or dread) that is the subject of this chapter.

Anxiety can produce both physical and emotional symptoms, some so severe they disrupt a person’s personal life, his family life, and his work. No wonder the apostle Paul wrote these words to the Christians, including church leaders, in Philippi: “*Do not be anxious about anything*, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6 – 7, emphasis mine).

WHAT PASTORS FEAR

Pastors struggle with maintaining this peace Paul describes as much as any of us. Throughout the survey process for this book, they

opened their lives to me through emails and letters, and expressed a number of anxieties and genuine fears connected with their church ministries.

Fear #1: Stunted Church Growth or Shrinking Membership

Mention church growth and some pastors immediately feel terror in their hearts. They might mistakenly believe that an abundance of warm bodies spells s-u-c-c-e-s-s. Success in ministry, of course, can't be measured with the world's yardsticks, but some church leaders and members expect the pastor to numerically "grow" the church. Today's society — even the church — often thinks that the bigger, the better and the more successful! Anxious pastors wrote:

I fear having to take the blame for our nongrowing church.

Lack of physical growth in my church, and inconsistent church growth, keep me awake at night.

I fear not being able to build a church ministry that's perceived successful by membership. They measure success by numbers.

Other pastors, even though they're faithful and giving the church their "all," watch with horror as their membership declines.

I genuinely fear a decreasing church membership with decreasing resources. Not every pastor who is faithful will pastor a growing congregation. The model today is to be the biggest, to have the full spectrum of programs a megachurch has, to be charming with all that goes with the look of leadership excellence. People consume [famous pastors' bestselling books] and expect their own pastors to be equally charismatic and attractive to the masses. Success often seems more important than a pastor's faithfulness to God and his congregation.

Different age groups in church often want completely different types of worship services, ministries, and programs. The pastor might relate better to one age group than to another.

I'm worried about trying to minister effectively to so many different age groups. I fear not being able to target certain groups of people, and not being current with church growth and leadership techniques.

I worry about my personal slowness in adding the young to my church. My church has lots of older members, and they're dying out with no young people to replace them.

Ultimately, pastors might get the blame for lack of church growth, but in most cases they're sincerely trying to grow the membership.

Fear #2: Dwindling Church Resources

When tithes slow down, and people stop giving money, pastors often fear for the survival of their church as well as their personal paycheck. In most churches, tithing and giving have decreased. Americans are giving more money now to charitable organizations than to churches. The situation is so grave that churches are accepting credit card payments and encouraging automatic checking account deductions from members' bank accounts.

A *Wall Street Journal* reporter writes: "Americans gave an estimated \$97 billion to congregations in 2006, almost a third of the country's \$295 billion in charitable donations . . . but giving to religion is growing more slowly than other types of giving . . . that's partly because people are attending church less frequently, . . . and are giving to a wider array of causes, including secular ones."^{[1](#)}

Anything and everything can determine a church's financial resources and members' contributions. When a church member loses his or her job, tithing may decrease. When companies transfer

tithing members to jobs in another state, the church loses both the church family and their tithes. When stock markets plunge, and the economy turns bad, the church may hurt financially. Pastors wrote to me about their fears regarding church finances.

What frightens me is when church members fail to support the church financially. They just don't understand how difficult a tight church budget makes ministry.

I fear financial problems in our church. It's hard to do ministry on a financial shoestring.

While lack of finances causes pastors night sweats, they also worry about the church's spiritual state of being.

Fear #3: Spiritual Growth of the Congregation

Pastors said they feared their church might one day become like the church in Ephesus, of whom Jesus said, "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen!" (Revelation 2:1 – 7).

Pastors also feared becoming like the church of Laodicea, of whom Jesus said: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:14 – 23).

Pastors know that when a church forsakes its first love, Jesus Christ, or becomes lukewarm, it becomes little more than a social country club.

I fear we are becoming a self-absorbed consumer church. The Holy Spirit seems to no longer be the active force behind our church. He has been replaced with activity and busyness.

Not many people are excited any more about missions or the church's spiritual state.

I'm afraid our church has too much of the world in it, and not enough Jesus!

Fear #4: Church Violence

Only recently have some pastors developed new fears for the physical safety of their congregation. It's no wonder, given incidents like the those in December 2007, when a twenty-four-year-old gunman opened fire at the Youth With a Mission Center in Arvada, Colorado, and later in the parking lot at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, killing four people and wounding several others before killing himself.

A church opens its front doors wide and welcomes everyone inside. No entrance screening or security pat-downs take place. Pastors, deacons, and church staff members have no way of knowing each visitor's or member's intentions or motives — anything could happen and it sometimes does.

Bob Klamser, of Crisis Consulting International, who works with three faith-based organizations that are reexamining their security in light of recent shootings, claims: "Churches and faith-based organizations, especially the larger ones, can be a lightning rod for people who are unbalanced or have other issues. Churches should be a holy place, a set aside place. But on the other hand, for those who come to worship, it's reasonable for them to expect to be safe."[2](#)

THE MOST SURPRISING PASTORAL FEARS

While I expected church pastors to have fears concerning the church — its dwindling congregation, its lack of growth, its diminishing

financial resources, the spiritual state of its members, and its physical safety from the threat of violence, I did not expect or anticipate the average pastor's greatest fear: *himself*.

When I asked pastors to anonymously name their fears, I was surprised how downright personal they became. More than anything else, pastors told me they feared their own secret inadequacies, limitations, and human failings as they shepherded God's people, the church.

What are some of the personal things that caused them the most worry and anxiety professionally?

Fear #6: Being Fired

How can a pastor fully love and serve a congregation that may hand him a "pink slip" at any time? Pastors know all too well that the office of pastor comes with little, if any, job security. Some churches even hold annual "pastor evaluation" meetings to decide, as a congregation, if the pastor stays or goes. Some denominations have a governing board that decides when and where a pastor is relocated. The congregations of other denominations can decide (without warning) whether or not to vote the pastor out. Pastors have a legitimate fear when they express their anxieties about getting fired. And when a pastor is fired by his church, the pastor, his wife, and his children all feel the sharp sting.

Every time I take my family on vacation, I wonder if I'll have a job when I return. I've heard too many horror stories of the church board meeting while the pastor is gone, so they can fire him. It's hard to have a relaxing vacation when you're afraid to come home!

I've been in my church for ten years. I'm afraid some of my members want a change in the pulpit. For many church members, firing the pastor is like changing cars — a new one is

fun to drive! I fear being terminated by my church people who decide they just want a change.

Sometimes a pastor will resign because he fears the church will fire him.

I'm very much afraid of being fired. I resigned one church in 2000, along with all five full-time staff members, due to the hateful attitudes of five church members. Had we not resigned, I'm sure they would have tried to fire us.

Some ministers also worry about a forced retirement when they reach a certain age.

I'm scared my church will retire me on my sixty-fifth birthday. And I want to pastor way past sixty-five.

One pastor feared growing older and losing his present ministry.

I worry about getting old (I am forty-eight). I fear I'll be sidelined to small and struggling churches as larger and healthier churches choose younger pastors. I've seen this happen to many pastors of a certain age who have had flourishing ministries when they were younger, but now struggle to find a church where they can continue to use their gifts.

Of course, pastors leave their churches for many reasons — not just because they are fired or forced to retire.

A recent study by Ellison Research showed: "The most common reason for moving from one church to another is a desire to serve in a different type of community or a different region of the country."³

Conflicts with church leaders or members, divorce, personal sickness, the illness of a spouse or child, a church crisis that can't be resolved, discouragement, burnout, family pressure, the need for more income, God's call to another church, and a denominational

transfer are among other reasons for a pastor's leaving his church. Some young pastors move into a church situation right out of seminary, and later realize they don't have the experience needed to shepherd a congregation. Others feel a call from God to leave and go to another church and/or denomination.

But whatever the reason a pastor and his family leave a church, it can be a frightening transition. It usually means a new church environment, a new city to adjust to, children leaving schools and friends, the pastor's wife leaving her friends/employment/support system/family, the move to a new home, and so on. In short, it means starting over somewhere else.

I received a heartbreaking letter from a pastor's wife recently. She wrote about her husband's painful forced resignation:

My husband, forty-nine, resigned as the pastor of our church this past Wednesday. It concludes a year of deep controversy in our church and five years of periods of conflict. God is faithful, and he has provided for us. Hopefully, we'll relocate in the next year to a new ministry position.

I wish our church members could realize that when they see a fault in my husband, that's their opportunity to pray for him, and not an opportunity to criticize him.

Preaching and helping to heal broken hearts bring my husband incredible joy in ministry. But my husband has feared being fired for many of his twenty-plus years in ministry. Now that he has resigned under pressure, he realizes he'll be okay. It frustrates me that church members so often get stuck on their personal complaints and lose sight of the bigger picture. They needlessly weigh down the pastor with each stone they lay on his shoulders until it becomes too difficult to deal with. They don't understand the cumulative effect of each stone placed on him.

Our church isn't going to be blessed until they see how they're wasting time with their grumbling and complaining. Church members who put their need to complain over the mission of the church have lost sight of why we're a church.

Each year, for the past twenty years, I've personally listened to, cried with, prayed with, and tried to encourage the hundreds of pastors' wives who, with their husbands, have attended Beeson Divinity School's annual pastors' school on the campus of Samford University. Most come in great need of a listening ear, someone to understand their hurts, and other pastors' wives to counsel them and pray with and for them.

At our very first pastors' school in 1988, we at Beeson Divinity School purposely established a separate pastors' wives track (workshops, teaching, counseling, interacting, fellowshiping, and praying together) because we recognized that pastors' wives, like their husbands, also have fears and anxieties. We hold these pastors' schools in July so that we can invite the participants to also bring their children of all ages. And they gratefully bring them — from babes in arms to toddlers to teenagers — so that we might love and listen and encourage them too.

Fear #7: Lack of Support in Crisis Situations

Not only did pastors and their families fear firings and/or forced retirements from their positions in the church, but they also feared the lack of support in a church crisis situation.

One pastor wrote about his constant worry:

In my third church, what I feared most were personnel, stewardship, and deacon's meetings. I never knew what I was going to be questioned about, what I was going to be blindsided with, or what would be said that was critical of me, my ministry, or what I was attempting to do.

Two pastors admitted their particular fears:

Church leaders just don't want to help me. They seem to work against me.

I fear a total breakdown in my support system. My deacons expect me to carry the whole ministry load. When anything goes wrong, they blame me — 'it's the pastor's fault,' they say.

Pastors told me they had nightmares about failing in some way and having no one in the church to support them and come to their defense and rescue.

Guy Greenfield, in his article "The Pastor's Worst Enemy," writes: "It is bad enough when a pastor is viciously attacked by caustic critics, but the greatest disappointment is the passiveness of those the wounded minister thought were his friends and supporters. They could have defended him but chose not to do so, either because they were afraid or because they didn't care."[4](#)

A pastor might invest his entire life in a church's ministry only to have leaders or members turn against him, viciously attack him, and then shun him and his family. Some pastors endure personal and professional abuse from the church, and have no bishop or denominational advocate to protect them.

Again, Greenfield says: "When clergy are being abused by church bullies, and key lay leaders do little or nothing to stop it, the minister is usually all alone and feels it deeply. Those who should be rushing to his defense are seemingly nonexistent or strangely and disappointingly silent."[5](#)

Fear #8: Mistreatment by Church Leaders

A number of pastors admitted they worried about criticism, conflict, and behind-the-scenes actions taken against them by church leaders and staff.

This constant worry can both affect and fragment church ministry.

I've seen pastors and their families leave churches with broken hearts because of bad treatment by the deacons, staff, and members. When this happens, pastors may leave the ministry forever, or wait years before they risk another pastorate. Their wives and children may become so disillusioned with the church, they stop attending altogether. It's true that some church members and church leaders think the pastor is their personal employee, and they might treat him and his family like hired help.

Fear #9: Their Own Inept Spiritual Leadership

Many pastors admitted they didn't think they had the qualities of spiritual leadership needed to shepherd God's people. They worried about the extent of their spiritual and biblical knowledge. Some questioned their own spiritual commitment to lead a congregation to greater spiritual growth.

I'm afraid of being embarrassed due to my lack of biblical knowledge.

I fear I may do something in my spiritual weakness that'll cause someone else to miss heaven. I want my life to match Jesus. I wish I were more than just human.

I fear not being able to adequately and clearly communicate God's Word.

I worry I might mislead someone, that is, I might teach something that is not biblical. I don't want to fail in growing God's kingdom.

Pastors also questioned their personal leadership skills as they stepped into a position of leading a church.

I'm afraid I'm inadequate to lead my growing church to the next level and with greater depth and health.

I fear looking back on serving as pastor and not leading the church to its potential.

What I fear is not having the leadership 'chops' to make a difference. Our modern tone of church literature on leadership has overemphasized a person's ability to proclaim a compelling vision, rally the church/troops, and usher in a new day for his community by the mere force of his personality. Not being that bombastic of a leader, the enemy tempts me with fear. But our Chief Shepherd is always kind to reassure me that this is his church, and I must simply follow him with a passion for his glory.

Some pastors admitted they worried about personally harming the church. They felt awesome responsibility as the church's leader and confessed personal weaknesses.

I've seen several ministries tank in the past few years, and I know my own weaknesses. I don't want to do any harm to the body of Christ. I want to lead and love well.

My greatest fear is leading the church in a certain direction and my leadership not working. I'm also concerned that I may cease to be effective in my ministry and messages, and not know how to correct it. I know I'd feel completely helpless if that happened, and I wouldn't accomplish what I should.

I sometimes worry that I do good things, but [not] the best things. How can I distinguish between the good and the best, and make the correct choice for the good of my church?

In my seminary education, too much emphasis was placed on Greek and Hebrew, and not enough on pastoral duties within a biblical concept. I am educated to preach, but I can't pastor very effectively. My members need good pastoral care, and I'm not sure I can do that well.

I have a problem with keeping focused. It's so easy for me to get distracted from doing God's work. The everyday administrative tasks draw my attention to the world rather than to the things of God. I don't want my church to suffer because of my inadequacies.

I fear failure and unintentionally hurting my members — the failure to meet everyone's expectations of me.

THE FEARS OF SIN AND FAILING

The last three fears noted in this chapter are based on a pastor's longing to stay close to God and to not be shamed or cause his family shame. In a nutshell, it's his fear of giving in to temptation.

According to church pastor and author Alistair Begg in *The Hand of God*: "Temptation is an enticement to evil or to sin. It is something all of us face, even the Lord Jesus Himself. Therefore, it is not a sin to be tempted. It is our response to temptation that leads us down the path of righteousness or into the dead end of disobedience."⁶

Fear #10: Temptation and Moral Failure

Every Christian struggles with giving in to temptation, but unlike the average Christian, a pastor's moral failure greatly affects his position, his family, his church, and his community. When a pastor fails morally or gives in to temptation, often church leaders, staff, and

members refuse to forgive him and restore him. Instead, they “shoot” him . . . and then they fire him!

Think about all the human failings of men and women in the Old and New Testaments. If, because of a moral failure, God had banished them or refused to allow them to continue their ministries, the Bible’s leaders would be in short supply! Many of the Bible’s pages would be blank. Consider the failures, as well as the restorations, of men and women such as Adam and Eve, Moses, David, Elijah, Jonah, Peter, Paul, and a host of others who failed horribly, but found forgiveness and restoration in God’s sight after repenting, and became future leaders in God’s kingdom work.[7](#)

Unfortunately, today’s pastoral ministry proves to be a profession with zero tolerance for moral failures. One mistake and (usually) the pastor and his family are gone. They leave the church humiliated, with broken hearts and bowed heads, their family and career often damaged beyond recovery. Pastors told me they constantly worried about giving in to temptation, failing morally, or simply being *perceived* to have failed morally.

Fear #11: Failing a Spouse or Child

Several pastors confessed they feared personally failing their wife or children because of their professional vocation.

I constantly fear letting my wife and kids down by some act of momentary stupidity or ignorance in my ministry.

I daily fear disappointing my wife as I do church ministry, and I worry she’ll divorce me.

I worry about somehow hurting my children if I fail in my very public ministry.

I most fear letting my family down in some way. Temptations are constant, and I don't want to do anything to disqualify myself from ministry and embarrass them.

Fear #12: Letting God Down

Not only did pastors fear failing their families due to their inadequacies, but they also feared failing God.

I fear I'm not doing God's Word justice by preaching and teaching it.

I'm afraid of rejection (or dislike) by my heavenly Father. My purpose in life is to glorify him. I hope I can do that.

I worry about not finishing well — letting God down by making another stupid mistake, and letting the church down by not being faithful for some reason to God's call.

I constantly ask myself if I'm doing a good enough job for my Lord and Savior. I'm afraid of being shown in heaven all the things I could have accomplished for him.

I don't want to wake up one morning to realize I've been failing my Lord.

I fear not finishing the race as strongly as I should. I've witnessed too many people in leadership positions bring disgrace to their families, churches, and God. I'd rather be dead than to cause this kind of harm. Therefore, my daily prayer is for more grace. I claim Philippians 1:6 regularly.

Fear #13: Falling Out of Love with God

Some pastors admitted they feared losing their love for God. Of all people, pastors know the effects of spending too little time with God

— spiritual dryness, losing their sense of God as their “first love,” and experiencing a seeming distance from God when they pray.

I’m concerned with not being able to find the love for the Lord I once had.

What if I lose my deep level of faith in God? I know that without the power of the Holy Spirit, I can’t accomplish anything.

I worry about staying true to God’s Word. I wish I could take a few months off each year for spiritual study and enrichment. Preaching three times weekly takes its toll on my relationship with God.

Bottom line, nothing good comes when pastors worry, feel anxiety, or experience unhealthy fear. Henri Nouwen writes: “One of the most notable characteristics of worrying is that it fragments our lives. The many things to do, to think about, to plan for, the many people to remember, to visit, or to talk with, the many causes to attack or defend, all these pull us apart and make us lose our center.”⁸

A church pastor has much too much work to do for God to allow unhealthy fear to pull him apart and make him lose his center.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their vocational fears?

- . Fear is a human emotion; pastors are not immune.
- . Fear can be both healthy and unhealthy. Unhealthy fear can render a pastor or even a congregation powerless and ineffective in ministry. The opposite of fear is not courage, but faith.

- . Pastors worry about church growth, church finances, the spiritual growth of the congregation, and even — in this day and age — the physical safety of their flock during services.
- . The pastor's greatest fear is often himself and his own inadequacies or failures. A minister may fear being fired, not being supported in a crisis, or being treated poorly by his board. He may also fear not being the spiritual leader he needs to be.
- . A pastor may fear moral failure, letting down his family and God, or even being a disappointment to God. Some fear they won't live up to God's plan for their lives and ministries.
- . When pastors make mistakes or fail in some way, they need to be forgiven, not condemned, criticized, or shunned.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . As a church, reassure your pastor of your love for him, the value of his ministry, and your appreciation for the gifts he brings to the church. Let him know his position is secure.
- . Show your pastor support, especially during frustrating and disappointing periods of church life.
- . Forgive him and restore him when he fails or makes mistakes.
- . Know that the Holy Spirit is solely responsible for church growth. Be careful not to blame your pastor for those things he can't control.
- . Tithe regularly; keep your pledge promises; work with the church to keep expenses low and finances on track.
- . Pray for the spiritual growth of your fellow church members.

- Celebrate your pastor's call to ministry, his gifts to serve, and the hard work he does for the church. Let him know (either verbally or in writing) how much you appreciate him and his family.

Encourage him when he faces discouragement or disappointment, or during the times he lacks confidence in his role as pastor.

- Work together as a church to provide safety for all your members, visitors, and leaders.

CHAPTER 9: “YOU’RE DIFFICULT NOW AND THEN”

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Colossians 3:15

PASTORS ARE LEADERS WHO GENERALLY work well with people — even difficult people. Recently, fifty pastors and clergy teamed up with local police in one of Boston’s high-crime neighborhoods. Police hoped the pastors could help them specifically bridge gaps between people, build relationships, and break down barriers between law enforcement and residents that often contributed to the violence and lack of trust in the neighborhood. *The Boston Globe* reported: “The idea is that residents in these neighborhoods trust clergy members more than police. This new program certainly underscores the importance of the pastors, that they are trusted.”^{[1](#)}

YOU AND YOUR PASTOR

Even though people trust pastors and hold them in high esteem, pastors told me that dealing with church members — especially difficult church members — is the most challenging part of their ministry.

In fact, unless a pastor starts his own church, he will be called to a new position and will inherit a whole congregation full of people — some longtime members, some new members, some kind and helpful, some bickering and cruel. Despite his desire for harmony and despite being motivated by God’s love, he will encounter people

who stretch him to his limits. Listen to one pastor's unbelievable story:

When I started once at a new church, I went into it not knowing what nightmares awaited me on the deacon board. I didn't know that the chairman of deacons had been divorced. In fact, his ex-wife had run away with the son of my new next-door neighbor. She and the chairman already had two children, but after she married my neighbors' son they had two children as well. Then, as it turns out, the chairman of deacons had also remarried, and had three children with his second wife.

As crazy as it sounds, all these families had parents and grandparents, and they all came to the same church week after week, and sat in the back on opposite sides of the aisle.

Another deacon had left his wife for another woman, but didn't marry her. Instead he married another, then left this second wife for a third. He owned a local business, but that was where his credibility ended, because he was also known as the local neighborhood 'flasher.' He went from door to door in the community, exposing himself to anybody who'd open the door.

As if it wasn't shocking enough to find a man like that on the board I'd inherited, I had another deacon in that church who was the wealthy 'money man' of the community, but he was a dirty old soul. Though he and his wife were never able to have children, he had a child — and grandchild! — from an ongoing affair with a thirty-year member of the church. To add to his list of vices, I noticed one Sunday how the man couldn't take his eyes off a girl in the next pew — who was young enough to be his daughter.

This was my board, the people who were supposed to assist in the guidance of my new church and the spiritual leadership of the congregation!

Thankfully, not every pastorate is that challenging!

Your Pastor Cares about You

Many pastors told me they wanted their church members to know that, first of all, they love them, appreciate them, and want the very best for them.

I will do anything with Christ's guidance to love them.

I wish my members knew how much I love them and how I am hurt by their unkind words.

I love my members. I am concerned for their spiritual maturity, and I want to see them grow in the Lord.

The desire of my heart is to see my members grow in love for God and for each other.

I'm not playing, I really love my members!

I wish my church members knew how much I lie awake at night and think about them, pray for them, and stress over issues in our church that, in light of eternity won't matter, and yet so many make it matter today.

I wish my members could see my heart more clearly, and realize how much I truly love them.

Your Pastor Wants to Be Liked

Pastors also admitted they wanted their church members to like them! They didn't want to be disliked by anybody. One noted he had already suffered enough rejection from the world and didn't need it from his congregation, and others echoed that plea for acceptance.

I am human first, then a pastor. It hurts so badly to be disliked, criticized, or ostracized when my intentions are noble.

I'm a people-pleaser by nature, so being disliked is a big deal to me. But it's really impossible to please all the church members all the time. Still, I really run myself ragged trying to.

At times I wrestle with those members who don't accept me or like me for whatever reason. It seems there are so many immature believers who wear their feelings on their shoulders, and it can be very draining.

Your Pastor Wants to Meet Your Needs

Some pastors said they worried about failing their church members in some way. They said they were weighed down by God's call and felt the spiritual needs of their congregation.

I feel so burdened by God's call to ministry. I don't want to fail the Lord and the people.

I struggle with my own lack of maturity and I get discouraged when I don't see much response to the sermons. I hope my sermons are communicating God's message.

I wish my members understood that, as hard as I try, I often can't speak to every single one of them every single Sunday morning. It's not that I don't want to. It's just that oftentimes I just can't. I certainly don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.

I wish my people could understand that I genuinely care about their spiritual, social, and physical health, and that if it sometimes seems I'm remote, it's not that I don't care. It's just I'm so caught up in the duties of the day, my mind may be somewhere else.

I try to be 'all things to all people.' But when I'm faced with some of the significant challenges in pastoral ministry, I very quickly realize my own limitations. I wish I had all the answers, but I don't.

Your Pastor Wants a Relationship with You

Pastors said they valued the good relationships they had with some members of their congregations and craved better relationships with other members:

I know vulnerability produces good relationships with people. I personally wish I could be more transparent with my members. But I'm afraid they'll interpret that transparency as personal weakness in me. I wish they knew of the love I have for each of them, and of my desire to see them succeed as Christians — to be able to walk with Christ consistently, and to develop an intimacy with him in their personal lives.

I wish they knew my passion for serving God, and for serving with them, side by side, as a team.

Our extended family lives hours away. I wish our members would include us in some of their family gatherings or just offer to spend time with us that has nothing to do with the church. Usually, people don't know how to talk to me about anything that isn't church or spiritually related.

Two pastors told me how much it hurt them when they had developed good relationships with church members, and then, for some unknown reason, the members left the church — with no explanation, and with no good-bye.

People have a way of supporting you, and your dreams, goals, and visions for the church, but then, all of a sudden, they turn against you and your ideas. They leave the church and

never tell you they're going to leave, or why they left. That really discourages me, and I feel like a good friend has let me down. I miss them when they leave.

It hurts me when a member stops attending, and they haven't expressed their issue for leaving with anyone in leadership. Sometimes they've already shopped around and joined another church before we've even learned they're dissatisfied.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT MEMBERS

Let's face it — some Christians are difficult to get along with. They may be unkind, cruel, or caustic. They may treat the pastor like he's their “paid boy.” When we peer into the backgrounds of difficult people, we can often see why they've become hateful or bitter, mean or vengeful.

John Burke writes in *No Perfect People Allowed*: “I find most people are secretly running from the evil twins of despair and shame chasing close behind. Pile on the prevalence of divorces, addictions, abortions, sexual compulsions, and workaholism — and emerging generations are left gasping for hope.”²

Some people are miserable and friendless, and bring pain to everyone they meet. Several years ago, the American Sociological Review published a disturbing study titled: “Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks Over Two Decades.”³ The researchers reported a “remarkable drop in the size of people's core network of confidants — those with whom they could talk about important matters.” Take a look at the difference between the friendships of average Americans in 1985 compared to 2004:

	IN 1985	IN 2004
Number of close friends	3	2
Percentage with a “healthy circle” of four or five friends	33 percent	15 percent
Percentage of Americans with no confidants at all	10 percent	25 percent

People in our society are often lonely and afraid. They may purposely isolate themselves and be unwilling to commit to relationships. It can be a difficult time to be a church pastor.

But regardless of who these people are, where they’ve come from, how they act, what they believe, or how much tension and pain they cause in the church, the pastor must minister to them all. They are the church!

In Acts 5, Peter faced difficult church members in his ministry, specifically Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, who both lied and tried to deceive their congregation. When Peter confronted Ananias, he didn’t say: “Ananias, you lied to me and to the members of the church.” Instead, he said: “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that *you have lied to the Holy Spirit . . . ?*” (v. 3, emphasis mine). Ananias’s crime involved deceiving God, not just the church.

The apostle Paul had his moments with difficult church people too.⁴ He wrote to the Corinthians that word of their quarrels had reached him, and he wasn’t pleased. Paul then urged them: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Incidentally, he issued the same instructions to the Roman church: “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have

learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites” (Romans 16:17 – 18).

The situation in the Philippian church was so intense, Paul called out the quarrelsome duo by name, writing: “I plead with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel” (Philippians 4:2 – 3). These two women had apparently ministered faithfully in the church, until they had the falling-out that led to their notorious reprimand from the apostle.

It seems that all pastors must deal with difficult people in their churches!

Difficult Members Will Suck the Life from Your Pastor

Sometimes difficult members can severely frustrate the church pastor. Listen to some of the surveyed pastors’ comments.

Difficult church members and conflict issues take such an enormous amount of personal energy out of my life, and often a significant amount of leadership energy from staff and volunteer leaders. Most of the issues have no or little importance to the kingdom of God, or have any eternal consequence. Sadly, most conflicts don’t seem to get resolved satisfactorily. I’ve found that preaching, exposure to Scripture, etc., just don’t seem to help most difficult people change their behavior.

Difficult members — every group, religious or not, has these people. I don’t think anyone enjoys these folks. In my church, they can be most disruptive.

Some difficult church members are unaware of their difficult personalities; some are aware and simply refuse to listen to encouragement or correction. Unless they are willing to change,

to conform to the likeness of Christ, they'll experience stagnant spiritual growth. And they'll make the rest of us miserable.

We have several church members who have acquired a sense of entitlement through longevity, and they refuse to listen to new ideas. They provoke much displeasure from other members. This often leads to conflict and passive resistance to new emphases, programs, and mission opportunities.

I hate the conflict and disruption in the fellowship! We've just come through yet another major conflict. I just wish our people could get along with each other.

We have constant conflict among our members. Silent wars are being waged in my church. Some of my church members have turned against me and stabbed me in the back. It hurts!

We've got so much friction between two groups within my church. We've had very little growth because of it.

I despise the silly, petty complaints that come from some of our people — they're the ones who are usually very selfish in nature.

Stragglers discourage me. They're the people who are content to remain on the fringes of God's work in the community. They're the ones who are the last to get involved in the work, but the first to speak a negative word about what's wrong with the work. They are the first to withhold, and the last to invest.

We're a healthy, growing church, but some of our members don't like change, and are unwilling to change their methods of reaching the lost and ministering to people in the community. They cause much tension in our church.

I get so tired of people in my church griping and bellyaching over such unimportant things.

Some people think since I'm the pastor, I should be their puppet to play the role that satisfies them.

We have members who seldom participate in any church activities, yet openly criticize me and other church members, because they believe the pastor and church don't minister to their needs or care for them.

SEARCHING FOR MATURITY

Most pastors yearn for mature Christians to fill their church pews. What are the marks of a mature Christian? Gordon MacDonald gives the best . definition I've heard: Mature Christians, he writes, are "self-sustaining in spiritual devotions. Wise in human relationships. Humble and serving. Comfortable and functional in the everyday world where people of faith can be in short supply. Substantial in conversation; prudent in acquisition; respectful in conflict; faithful in commitments."

MacDonald goes on to explain that mature Christians often suffer, and face challenges that scare most people. They wrestle with questions that have no easy answers. They often say "no" while others will indulge themselves and say a quick "yes." He writes that mature Christians aren't afraid to wrestle with the devil even if they lose. They just get up again, repentant and more humble.⁵

Imagine how different church ministries would be if everyone in the pew had the qualities of a mature Christian!

Your Pastor May Blame Himself for a Member's Immaturity

Pastors told me they sometimes blamed themselves for the behavior of difficult people in their congregations — and, what's more, one

pastor even felt others placing the blame on him for a member's immaturity.

I struggle with pastoral care because I know God is in control. Sometimes I want so much to heal and cure. I know it's in God's hands, but I struggle with my own selfish desires to be able to do more to help people.

I believe my church members think I don't do church ministry well.

I feel I'm not very good at providing pastoral care. I believe I'm a good preacher, teacher, and administrator. However, I'm not compassionate enough, and I don't spend enough time with church members to provide them the level of care they need.

Try as I might, I seem to lack compassion for church members in certain situations.

I always feel like I've not done enough.

I worry that some important pastoral needs will somehow slip through the cracks unnoticed by me, or our church leadership and pastoral staff.

It frustrates me when I face ministry demands greater than I am trained to handle.

My own lack of seminary counseling training frustrates me. I have to do a lot of counseling in my church. It's the area I spend most of my time, and I feel greatly unprepared. I have to do it anyway, but usually I

don't feel good about it.

It all ties together. If I could organize better, then I could spend more time being spiritually fed through the Word. If I

didn't feel so stressed, then physically I would be feeling so much better. We buried a young man last week who committed suicide. I found it physically and spiritually draining. Just over a year ago, my youngest brother also committed suicide. At the moment, I wonder how I can help my church members when I feel spiritually, emotionally, and physically drained.

Your Pastor May Dread Member Confrontation

I also perceived pastors questioning their leadership skills in dealing with people, especially when it came to making unpopular, but needed, changes in the church and participating in or initiating necessary confrontations. They also confessed they often struggled with leadership technique. Stan Toler recognizes the leadership dilemma when he writes:

All leading is not the same. For example, if you respond too passively to situations that demand heavy-handed attention, people will lose respect for you and dismiss your influence. A leader who cannot respond effectively in a crisis will lose the faith of followers. Conversely, if you try to assume too much control in situations where mere facilitation is required, it will be like crushing a rose in your clenched fist. You will lose talented people as they flee or turn dormant out of fear of confrontation.^{[6](#)}

RESPONSE IS HALF THE BATTLE (AND YOU STILL MAY NOT WIN)

Sometimes pastors make errors in judgment in dealing with church members they consider to be difficult. Recently I read about a church, the Allen Baptist Church in southwestern Michigan, whose pastor booted one of his fifty-year members out of the church. He said that seventy-one-year-old Carolyn Caskey, a former Sunday

school teacher who faithfully tithed 10 percent from her pension checks, had “questioned his authority,” and he charged her with “spreading a spirit of cancer and discord” in the congregation. He expelled her from worship services. But Mrs. Caskey ignored him and came to Sunday morning church service anyway.

From the pulpit, pastor Jason Burrick noticed the elderly woman sitting in the pew. He grabbed his cell phone and, as the congregation watched and listened, he dialed 911! He told the dispatcher to come arrest Mrs. Caskey because she was trespassing. A state trooper showed up at church, handcuffed Mrs. Caskey (who had her purse in one hand and her Bible in the other hand), and took her away.

She paid her bail (\$62), and the judge gave her permission to go back to church. He also told the pastor not to call 911 unless Mrs. Caskey was causing a disturbance. When the elderly woman returned to church worship services, however, the other members refused to speak to her or sit next to her. The entire congregation shunned Karolyn Caskey.⁷

Did this pastor assume too much control in a situation where mere facilitation was required? Did he crush a rose in his clenched fist? Or did he respond effectively in a crisis? Those are the kinds of questions pastors must ask and answer many times throughout the ordinary day as they deal with the people in the church.

Even when pastors correctly execute strong leadership in situations that need a heavy hand, they often face harassment, unfair criticism, and even lawsuits from their church members.

CHURCH MEMBERS MUST BE UNITED

The apostle Paul calls Christians to interact with each other in a gentle, loving, and humble fashion. In Ephesians 4:2 – 3, Paul urges

Christians: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

More is at stake than just one local church when Christians don't get along with each other. Everything suffers — worship, prayer, missions, evangelism, witness, and the world's “lost” people!

“In the church family,” write Dr. John Woodbridge and Dr. Timothy George in *The Mark of Jesus*, “when members are at odds with each other, their desire to worship God together, to pray together, and to support common causes for Christ diminishes greatly.

“This does not mean individuals cannot be used of God when they find themselves in fractured relations,” they state. “It does suggest that if disunity prevails in a family or in a church family, the Christians' witness to nonChristians will often diminish greatly. Many unbelievers will have a very difficult time recognizing Christians as Christ's authentic disciples if they see believers at each others' throats or coldly spurning each other's company.”⁸

Getting Along and Leading by Design

One of the best books I've read on dealing with people — especially difficult people — is *Leading by Design*, by Dr. Andrew Westmoreland, president of Samford University. Dr. Westmoreland examines twelve types of people, tells how Jesus dealt with them, and shows his readers how to understand and work with them. While he wrote the book for the leader in business, pastors and church members can learn a great deal about relating to and working with each other in church congregations.

Consider this series of thoughts from Dr. Westmoreland on two types of difficult people: those who are rigid and those who are demanding.

Demanding people come in all shapes and sizes. Their modes of operation may be different, but their goals are the same: to badger you into giving them what they want. Often, demands come in the form of whining, tears, pitiful pleas and accusations that if we don't do what they want, then we really don't love them. . . .

Rigid people use the dual powers of self-righteousness and condemnation to keep people in check. . . .

I personally believe that negative, cynical people are disillusioned optimists. At one time they hoped for the best, but when their hopes were unfulfilled they became bitter. . . .

They may come across as confident in their biting, negative assertions, but cynicism is just a mask to cover up the hurt and fear buried in their hearts.^{[9](#)}

I recommend that every staff member, deacon/elder, and church member read *Leading by Design* for its potential to bring greater understanding to those people who strive to support and encourage their pastor as he struggles to minister to people of all types. The book can also greatly help staff members, deacons/elders, and church members understand and get along with each other in the church community.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about relating to each other?

- . Most pastors love and appreciate their church members. Pastors crave good relationships with their flock. They want their members to like them.

- . They are concerned by their congregation's spiritual health and maturity.
- . A congregation's dislike, criticism, and rejection can hurt a pastor.
- . A congregation's dislike, criticism, and rejection can hurt Pastors often worry about failing their members.
- . Church members can often discourage a pastor, frustrate him, and break his heart.
- . Getting along and dealing with difficult people within the church can be one of a pastor's greatest challenges.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Talk with your pastor and encourage him often.
- . Thank him for his love, concern, and care for the congregation.
- . Be careful not to criticize your pastor. If confrontation, discernment, or helpful criticism is needed, remember to approach your pastor with love, gentleness, and in a private setting. Scripture tells us: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).
- . Be quick to forgive those members in your church who show immaturity in their faith, words, and relationships with other members. Pray for their spiritual maturity.
- . Pray especially for your pastor and church leaders as they strive to deal with difficult people in your congregation.

SECTION 3: YOUR PASTOR AND THE WORLD COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 10: “I WANT OUR CHURCH TO BE IN THE WORLD, NOT OF IT”

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO the church of the future. Named 12Stone, the Wesleyan church on Buford Drive in the Atlanta area, formerly called Crossroads Community Church, opened its doors in January 2008.

12Stone’s thirty-million-dollar facility has no sanctuary, but instead, a 2,500-seat high-tech “worship experience center.” A stage replaces the traditional pulpit platform, and the “primary communicator” preaches the sermon — for lack of a better term — with the help of five huge high-definition screens around the room to show films. A \$250,000 variable room acoustic system allows the stage to accommodate an orchestra, a praise band, or even someone with a soft voice.

The 105,000-square-foot building features a full-service Starbucks café, facilities for youth and children (from birth through college), living rooms for small groups, and film and recording studios.

The church estimates that half of its members are likely to be “spiritually unresolved” (people who never attended church as children or stayed away from church for decades).

“We want to get people in and serve them well, and give them the peace of a slower pace, something they wouldn’t find at the mall,” explains the church’s director of redemptive arts.

It should be noted, no children are allowed in the worship experience center. Parents drop off their children (using an electronic check-in system) beforehand in an “age-appropriate venue.” As the 12Stone spokesperson explained in a recent newspaper article, the church didn’t want some two-year-old to disrupt anyone’s experience.^{[1](#)}

Now, I ask you, how can the average traditional “little brown church in the vale” compete with that?

THE HOUSE CHURCH AND EMERGING CHURCH TRENDS

Some Christians have decided to leave the institutional church and meet with family and friends in their own homes to worship. A house church “is just the community of God meeting under the guidance of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit,” some in-house churches explain. Each house is a self-contained ministry, and requires “no sanctuaries to buy or maintain, no clergy to hire or support, no denominations to form, no membership rolls to join, no church budget to vote on, no building funds, and no TV ministry.” House-church advocates believe the house church is simply a return to first-century Christianity.^{[2](#)}

Another interesting trend is the emerging church movement. Dan Kimball writes: “A massive cultural shift is taking place around us. We’ve been moving from being a nation with a Judeo-Christian worldview to one which is producing generations whom are quite post-Christian and postmodern in their worldview.” As a result, he explains, “We are now beginning to notice the startling and drastic reduction in our adults and youth in our churches.”^{[3](#)}

For most, this new emerging church trend remains a mystery, and is difficult to describe, define, or understand. Still in its infancy, it

presents yet another piece in the puzzle of ministry in today's ever-changing culture.

WORSHIP TODAY

Some surveyed pastors wanted to leave the past behind, and usher in a newer, more up-to-date worship experience.

People want to linger in the past, not biblical history, but what church was like when they were kids. They think that will engage our culture. I like the term 'ancient future,' meaning that we look back to the ancient scriptures and church history to learn valuable lessons and paradigms for ministering in the present and future.

It's frustrating to deal with people in my church who are still living in the past when it comes to methodology and ways to reach people. It's as if they are completely unaware of the culture we live in and how it has changed.

I'm having a hard time trying to stay connected with the new generation, yet respecting the heart of older generations who want to keep church 'traditional.'

But the majority of pastors who responded to my survey admitted they felt out of touch and uncomfortable with the changing culture as it related to church worship. Many confessed the difficulty this issue has been in their ministry.

I'm starting to feel like a dinosaur, and I'm only forty-seven years old! I resist casual worship services and the use of technology.

More than ever before, I feel like an alien even within the Christian convention circle I belong to.

What has happened to the American culture? I was raised as a pastor's kid, so I've been around churches for several decades. When I was young, the church was the center of community activity. Today the church is barely noticed.

I feel all alone, and greatly inept, trying to minister to the current culture! I wonder if anybody even cares anymore about what pastors teach and preach!

The whole issue of the newer church music styles is very troubling.

Dale Burke, pastor of First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, California, believes that "a shrinking percentage of the culture even cares about what we [evangelicals] have to say." The challenge is to engage them without compromising the core message and its power. He believes the church must "lead with love," not with "slickness of the presentation but with the sweetness of acts of grace and kindness."⁴

CULTURE SHOCK

Pastors told me they have deep concerns about the church today, given culture's continued inroads.

My older members fear the future church leaders won't be a 'pastor' to them.

It's such a challenge to present a never-changing gospel to an ever-changing world.

I see an increasingly secular society in our church. All biblical convictions are seen as intolerance.

Pastors said they were confused about how to reach the new generation of Americans and feared the results of trying.

I'm concerned with tendencies that want to accommodate contemporary culture, rather than impact it. I see it in preaching styles — less exposition and biblical substance, and more casual communication. It seems more important to be popular than powerful.

I have deep concerns about ministering in today's culture. Our culture is moving fast and far from a life of commitment to Christ. It deeply concerns me about the ability to connect with today's culture.

In trying to connect with today's culture, and in their desperate attempt to reach young congregants, some pastors are turning to unusual recruiting tools. Many church members today actually expect their churches to haul supersized, big-screen televisions into their fellowship halls, and invite the church and community to watch the Sunday night Super Bowl game, believing it to be a legitimate form of outreach.

More recently, some pastors are excited about the use of a newer "evangelism tool": Microsoft Corporation's Halo 3 video game. Despite its "thou shalt kill" credo and the seventeen-year-old age requirement for purchase, some pastors (and youth pastors) across the country are bringing it into their churches as an "outreach tool," and are inviting teens to play it.

The trend has one pastor scratching his head and asking what price we as a church are willing to pay to remain relevant. Another wondered how far we're willing to go.

What's next? A Playboy Bunny jumping out of a cake? That'll bring 'em in for sure — but how far do we want to go with these so-called outreach tools? And what will they expect once we get 'em inside?

WHERE IS THE CHURCH HEADED?

Pastors said they were also seeing a significant change in Christians today, and that worried them. They worry about the future and how the change in Christians now will affect the church of tomorrow.

My people want therapy, not theology.

I fear for the church in America. I see the church being far more concerned about programs and entertainment than about Jesus.

I am concerned about ministering in this culture because postmod-erns seem to be more consumer-oriented. Our church worshipers want a rousing praise-and-worship time, but are less interested in the preaching of the Word. They seem more interested in emotional and psychological uplifts than in receiving a word from the Lord to grow their spiritual lives.

These last days are becoming discouraging because people lack interest in spiritual services.

It seems like Christians will 'go with Jesus,' unless something more fun comes along. They think of church as just another weekly appointment, rather than a commitment to Christ and a Christian lifestyle.

We need more dedication and determination from our church members. They feed too much at the world's table, and then come to church like a 'fatted calf ' with no appetite.

I believe inconsistent attendance grows out of a lack of commitment. I see extreme apathy among people these days, particularly the youth and young adults. I watch 'pew warmers' who just come and go, never get involved in church, and often complain about things. No one is on fire for Jesus anymore.

My grandfather, who died only three decades ago, wouldn't believe how church and worship have changed in such a short time. How could I possibly explain to him: "Papa, we don't go to church — uh . . . the 'worship experience center,' and listen to preachers preach anymore. We now listen to the 'primary communicator'! Sometimes we don't actually see him — we watch him communicate on projection screens from another building, another city, or another state. And then other times, we simply 'download' the 'primary communicator' and his 'communication' into our hard drives. When we move to a new city, instead of visiting a church, shaking hands with the 'primary communicator,' meeting all the other 'spiritually-unresolveds,' and filling out a visitor's card, we 'click' on their websites, tour their facilities, see what they have to offer (do they have a Starbucks? a sushi bar?), and shop around for the best 'fit.' Or we can 'attend church' at home in our warm pajamas and fuzzy robes via Internet, and hear 'virtual sermons' as we 'worship' with 'virtual congregations.' "

THE CONSUMER MENTALITY

We hear a lot about the church's consumer mentality. Pastors complain about it. Denominational leaders don't like it. But what exactly is it? It's the notion that evangelicals today "shop around" to find churches that fit an individual worshiper's personal needs. Just like consumers shop around for the restaurants that most please their taste buds, they also shop around and choose the churches that most please their spiritual "tastes" (and coffee preferences!). Many pastors call the consumer mentality the enemy to denominational and congregational loyalty.

And the Internet makes church shopping so easy these days. When church-shopping-season comes, church shoppers no longer need to visit the church, meet the members, scrutinize the music, and the like. They can simply visit the church's online website, evaluate the congregation, rate the worship service, and slide-show

the facilities. They shop for a church in the same ways they shop for a car or a new bedspread. “And,” writes G. Jeffrey MacDonald in *USA Today*, “that has some church people worried that the practice of faith is getting ever more impersonal — and consequently less powerful — in an age driven by efficiency and impatience.”⁵

Pastors are greatly concerned about the consumer mentality of today’s Christians and the effect this change is having on their churches.

Church-shopping is evil. In that mentality, there’s no way a small church can compete with the massive, program-diverse megachurch. The kingdom of God is not the same as selling a car to someone.

We truly live in an ‘iPod generation’ where everyone has his or her favorites about everything in life. That is what their lives center around. Sadly, we’ve become so conditioned to it, we don’t notice it anymore.

Our church culture is changing, whether we like it or not. I’m okay with new people being consumers of church because they don’t know any better. I am a bit frustrated, however, that people who claim to be longtime believers are sitting back being consumers and critics without much, if any, contribution.

The church has become Wal-Mart with a steeple! The whole enterprise of ‘shopping churches’ scares me.

CYBER-CHURCH

Researchers predict that by 2010, 10 to 20 percent of the population will rely primarily or exclusively on the Internet for their religious input. They expect the “cyber-church” to lure tens of millions of people away from the existing church.⁶

No doubt, that move will empty many of our pews, but there will be a price to pay. Where will a troubled teenager or adult in crisis go when she needs pastoral care and she attends a cyber-church? Another impersonal website? A telephone crisis hotline?

Not long ago, while working on a magazine article about teenage suicide, I called a leading national teen suicide hotline for some additional information. Only later did I discover that the telephone number I called was specifically meant for the teen or adult in crisis who contemplated killing herself or himself. Yet when I dialed it, what did I get? A recording! A computer answering machine told me to “call back between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.” Now I ask you, how can a hotline, a computerized answering machine, do the ministry of pastoral care? The answer is: *It can't*.

Surely, at some times in their ministries, pastors might wish they had a “pastoral care hotline” — an automated answering machine that would minister to hurting people without physical contact. Pastor Brian McLaren writes:

I've had a couple of semi-sleepless nights lately because some members of my congregation got into trouble and needed my pastoral help. Their situation seems so messy, so ugly, so intractable, and I feel the weight of trying to help them get through it with their faith intact. I confess, though, that I've wished at times I could be one of those pastors who never actually has to deal with people, who simply “shows up” on screen, not in person.^{[7](#)}

Never more in the history of our country have we needed Bible-believing pastors to counsel and reach out with Christ's love and care to society. People are hurting, they are hurting deeply, and they are hurting everywhere.

In his book, *No Perfect People Allowed*, John Burke writes: “As I have interacted with people in counseling situations, most born post-

1960, I find myself asking: 'What happened to this generation to produce so much chaos?' I hear story after story of neglect, physical abuse, sexual molestation, drug abuse, porn addictions, eating disorders, anger issues, serious crime, abortion, STDs, AIDS, and sexual addictions passing from one generation to the next. Issues once prevalent only in inner-city churches now live on Main Street."⁸ How will the cyber-church care for such hurting people?

THE GREAT CHURCH CHALLENGE

Like never before, today's pastors are trying hard to relate to and reach the unchurched in their communities. Many, however, feel like people in today's society have purposely blocked Christ and Christianity from their lives.

As I minister in today's culture, I'm not bothered by the hostility of a few, but the apathy of many.

Because of the pervasive postmodern mind-set of North Americans, it's a huge challenge to be able to effectively minister and communicate cross-culturally.

One of my greatest challenges is in the area of pastoral care and ministering to today's culture. I'm weary in looking for new ways to relate and build bridges to those who are unchurched.

I want to somehow relate to this culture, but without compromising the gospel.

In our desire to relate to the culture we live in, I'm seeing the culture take over the church and pulpit instead of making an impact on the culture through preaching the Word with application to life. Postmodernism is swiftly becoming the order of the day. I sometimes think I'm going to 'literally vomit' when I

hear preachers and people say the message never changes, but the methods must always be changing. Where did they find that in Scripture?! That's one of the new traditions that has replaced the Word of God. I fear we're losing the preaching of God's Word.

In an article by Tim Stafford in *Christianity Today* magazine, John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, is quoted as saying: "As in every age, the greatest challenge . . . will be to treasure above all goods and kindred and this mortal life that [which] Jesus revealed with infallibility, perspicuity, and sufficiency in the propositions of the written Word of God, the Bible."⁹

WHERE'S THE FAITHFUL CHURCH MEMBER?

Consistently pastors said they were disheartened by the declining attendance of churchgoers in this culture, as well as their decreasing level of commitment to the church.

If people missed days of work at their jobs like they do church, they'd all be fired.

I see parents more interested in taking their kids to sports events on Sunday mornings than taking them to church!

I see a general lack of commitment and regular church attendance. Society offers people too many gods.

The church seems to be the last thing on many people's priority lists.

It's frustrating to care so much about something (like the Great Commission) and to work with people who seem to care so little about it. Without member commitment, we can't really accomplish much worthwhile at church.

The overall lack of commitment among members, along with a 'what's in it for me' attitude, worries me. People often treat church as another activity on their 'to do' list, and serve only when it's convenient. It's sad because it keeps us from carrying out the mission of the church.

One pastor told me his declining church had moved into survival mode. He wondered if he should step aside and allow the church to hire a younger pastor.

In my church, we lack people, especially young people. I wonder if my age is a detriment. Someone younger behind the pulpit may have more drawing power. I wonder if my gifts would produce a better harvest in another capacity of service. I love being a pastor, but there are concerns about the ever-present lack of new souls being brought into the kingdom. I can't tell you the last time I led someone to the Lord, and knew it. There is nothing I am hiding, no sin unconfessed, and I'm very happily married. I love Jesus, and I'm thrilled he loves me. I hope I walk in grace and live a life worth modeling. Still . . . no babies are being born, and no young families are coming in. It feels like we're just in 'survival mode.'

Dwindling church attendance is affecting many churches today, and the situation often causes today's church pastors great spiritual angst. A recent study of 350,000 evangelical churches in America showed that four out of five have either plateaued or are declining, and no county in America has a larger church population than it did ten years ago. The study also showed that a "significant percentage of those who have attended church in recent years are either 'stalled' in their spiritual growth or 'dissatisfied' with their current church."[10](#)

Some pastors blamed themselves for the increasing flight of the flock.

I have found myself the most frustrated over things I can't control —like losing church members, yet I'm still held responsible by many members. The pastor cannot control changing neighborhood demographics or the culture at large that may be apathetic to church attendance.

Other pastors blamed those in their own congregations, naming at least ten different kinds of unreliable churchgoers:

1. Regular church attenders who refuse — out of embarrassment — to admit they are lost
2. Regular attenders who lack the desire to be close to God
3. Backsliding members who set a bad example
4. Church members who aren't willing to be trained in God's Word
5. Apathetic church members who create more work for the faithful, because they lack dedication and commitment
6. Church members who avoid much-needed volunteer ministry roles even though they possess the needed gifts and have time available
7. Young adult members, too busy with their lives to attend consistently
8. Older members who refuse to change their "old ways" to meet the future
9. Longtime members who are done coming to church because they have "served their time"
10. Church members who are influenced by the culture's growing hedonism

INCREASING HEDONISM IN OUR CHURCHES

Hedonism is a self-indulgent devotion to pleasure and happiness. For hedonists, pleasure and fun become a primary way of life. If involvement in an activity or institution — like the local church — isn't fun, pleasure-seeking hedonists stop participating, and this doesn't go unnoticed by their pastors.

The rampant hedonism in our society makes it harder to reach people in a viable way with the gospel. There's a pervasive self-centeredness among people today that's hard to crack.

The most discouraging and frustrating thing about ministry to me is that I so often find people wanting to play church rather than really being honest with God and with each other. The lack of true commitment to God that I [sense], not only in my church but the shallowness of so much American Christianity, seems more focused on 'me' and 'what I want' rather than on God and what he wants for a hurting, dying world outside the church.

Some of my church members want a chaplain, not a pastor. That is, they want someone there 'just for them' when they experience sickness or tragedy or a problem (or to perform a wedding, attend a baby shower, or . preach a funeral). But they rarely participate in any church activity. It's so difficult to provide adequate pastoral care when I don't have an ongoing personal relationship with these members.

I fear the church is becoming more a supermarket, and less a worshipping fellowship. It's gravitating to 'it's all about me.'

Some pastors even blame dwindling congregations on the culture's acceptance and practice of everyday relational rudeness that often spills from society into the church. They've noticed how their members are ignoring visitors — even being rude to them. One

pastor noted that it would be tough to find someone willing to worship with such rude individuals as those often found in our churches.

Rudeness in our culture and in our churches today is, indeed, a problem!

“Americans’ fast-paced, high-tech existence has taken a toll on civility,” writes Donna Cassata of the Associated Press. “From road rage in the morning commute to high decibel cell-phone conversations that ruin dinner out, men and women behaving badly have become the hallmark of a hurry-up world.”^{[11](#)}

In today’s culture, we see rudeness glorified in television media and print, by news anchors, talk show hosts, athletes, politicians, celebrities, and so on. Children are learning to relate badly to other people, and practice rudeness in their everyday lives. It shouldn’t surprise us that rudeness has followed people into the church, and that it often creates conflict, rift, and “church flight” among members.

Some pastors try to be more understanding of today’s Christian and the tremendous cultural pressures they face as they try to be a committed church member, church supporter, pastoral encourager, and regular worship attendee. As theologian Elizabeth Achtemeier writes:

It is not easy to lead a Christian life in our society, to cling to God’s truth when all about us are declaring that their opinion is the only truth; to forget about self in a society that seeks only to look out for number one; to hold a marriage and home together when easy divorce has become the custom; to insist on justice at a time when pride and wealth and power are our culture’s goals; to be willing to forgive when other persons want only what a wrongdoer deserves.

But, she concludes, “God in Christ sends us his Spirit to correct and guide and support us, and we come to realize that it is not we who are working, but . Christ who is working in us. Thus obedience to God is marked not by self-righteousness, but by humility that knows that apart from Christ we can do nothing that serves God’s purpose.”[12](#)

It’s true, ministering in today’s culture is not easy and no doubt it’ll just get harder. But, even with its difficulties, challenges, and disappointments, pastors are given a great spiritual truth and encouragement about the work they do in the pulpit, in the congregation, and in the ever-changing world. It’s found in Philippians 1:6: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” That’s a promise for your pastor!

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about ministering in today’s culture?

- . Church worship is changing and some pastors are confused and concerned about new trends.
- . Some pastors feel out of touch and uncomfortable with today’s culture.
- . Changing ideas about worship bring today’s pastor both fear and challenges.
- . Lack of church member commitment and inconsistent church attendance disturb and dishearten many pastors.

- . Pastors are noticing a greater consumer mentality in today's congregations.
- . Pastors are desperately searching for ways to minister effectively, preach God's Word without compromise, and communicate to various cultures and age groups.
- . Hedonism and rudeness are increasing among people in today's churches.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Commit (or simply recommit) yourself to your pastor and to your church. Support him, the church staff, and the congregation with your prayers.
- . Prayerfully examine your own heart about your church participation. Strive to be consistent in your attendance at worship services.
- . Encourage your pastor to preach God's Word without compromise.
- . Help your pastor as he reaches out to various cultures and age groups in the church.
- . Evaluate the way you personally relate to your pastor, church staff and leaders, fellow church members, and visitors. Ask yourself: Do I encourage them? Am I kind in my words? Am I ever unintentionally rude or careless in my comments? Could I be more supportive and encouraging?

CHAPTER 11: “PREACHING TO YOU IS THE HARDEST THING I DO”

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Tim othy 2:15

IN HIS BOOK,*Doctrine That Dances*, my good friend Dr. Robert Smith Jr. defines the preacher as an “exegetical escort.”¹ I like that definition! He writes:

The exegetical escort is one who ushers hearers into the presence of God for the purpose of transformation. Once the exegetical escort has ushered hearers into the presence of God and given them the Word, the escort’s job is over. The escort leaves them in the throne room of God and lets God transform them.²

Pastors have many roles in their church ministry, one of the most important of which is preacher. Pastors told me that preaching was the most enjoyable, and also the most difficult, job in their position as pastor. They said it was both rewarding and frustrating, wonderful and terrible. They confessed that preaching God’s Word proved a huge responsibility for them and a great pressure on them. Why?

. Preachers must “take the original meaning of the [biblical] text — the text as it is, even though it cuts, confronts, and challenges both the preacher of the Word and the hearers to whom the Word is preached.”³

Pastors wrote much about this awesome responsibility in response to the survey, pointing out the difficulties of handing their congregations God's Word week after week.

I am always overwhelmed at the responsibility of preaching and fulfill-ing the great need that people have to know and understand the Word in order to know and love the triune God through the preeminence of Christ.

Every week, I am faced with three great responsibilities: a Sunday morning sermon, a Sunday evening sermon, and an effective Wednesday night Bible study. They must be fresh, not sounding redundant and trite. They need outstanding illustrations, as well as practical, thoughtful applications of the text. If emergencies come up during the week (which they will), and time-diminishing petty problems arise among the congregation (which they will), and pastoral ministry responsibilities need to be taken care of (and they do), my sermon preparation time is limited and hindered. When that happens, I always feel I come to the pulpit not as prepared as I'd like to be.

It's a task to provide an engaging, Spirit-filled message weekly. But the Word of God is still effective and relevant today, and that's my big responsibility — to stand in the pulpit and proclaim the living Word of God.

Pastors also told me that they wish their congregations knew the effort and study that they put into the weekly teaching.

The best way that I, as a pastor, can show my love for my church members is to spend vast amounts of time in prayer and preparation to deliver to them God's truth.

How much I love them, and the way I show it is faithfully and accurately feeding them God's Word.

How many long hours I put into message preparation each week.

In spite of the joy and reward of preaching, pastors admitted that preaching God's Word often creates some frustration, fear, and tension in their lives.

How frustrating and challenging it is to have the task of providing an engaging, Spirit-filled message each week while my church members compare my preaching to the best and brightest preachers on TV and radio! I feel as if I have to compete with them to keep my congregation's attention.

I greatly feel the frustration of preaching my heart out for these past fifty-two years, and seeing so little change among the people, even though I try to prepare well — both the sermons and myself.

I struggle with my own lack of spiritual maturity when I preach, and I allow myself to get discouraged when I don't see much response to my messages.

I often fear not doing God's Word justice when preaching and teaching it.

It takes great emotional energy to prepare and deliver substantive sermons every week!

One pastor confessed that he often wondered if his preaching was effective and if his style of preaching reached the people as it should.

Sometimes I think it is almost impossible to please a congregation with preaching style. I wonder if I should preach topical sermons or expository messages. I know each of those terms is loaded with different meanings and interpretations. How can I feed my spiritually mature members "meat," and at the

same time give “milk” to my spiritual babes? Should I be seeker-sensitive or traditional in my sermons? When I started pastoring thirty years ago, ministry and preaching were much simpler. It seems, however, to have become much more complicated and controversial these days!

Another pastor told me that preaching style (both his style and the former minister’s style) had clashed in his church, and he feared it might cause a congregational division. He explained:

I followed a pastor who had been leading the church for thirty years. He resigned, but didn’t give up his position. By that I mean he’s still a member of the church, and a small group wants to keep honoring him, and wants him to return to the pulpit. I don’t mean for this to sound bitter, but it’s time for him to move on. It has led to division in the church. I still love and appreciate him as my former pastor, but the church had become stagnant, and the small group was happy to sit in the pews and hear the same sermon over and over, with no motivation to move forward in spiritual growth and ministry. The majority of the congregation had longed for a change in leadership and preaching style.

I now have the support of this majority, but a small group keeps complaining and griping about the use of technology (a sound system, a PC projector, computer accounting of the church finances, etc.). This small group resists any change, because we have never done it this way before, and they are trying to divide the church. My ministry style is a lot different than the one he had. My preaching style is more dynamic, and I believe in sermon presentations that emphasize life application, utilize appropriate humor, and contain dynamic illustrations.

This style has led to an increase in church membership and personal commitment for me and the majority of our members. I preach with enthusiasm, and I spend a lot of time in preparation.

My goal is to please God first, but my personal weakness is to be a people-pleaser. I know I have to discipline myself, and not conform to another's view of whom or what a pastor should be.

PREACHING WITH CONFIDENCE?

A number of pastors admitted they felt a lack of confidence in their sermon preparation and sermon delivery. They often felt inadequate in their role as preacher.

I don't feel I'm a strong preacher. My worship leader is a reluctant volunteer. There's only one of me, and I have limitations. I need help with preaching and worship.

I'm a relatively new pastor, and I'm always concerned that I'm doing the right thing the right way. I want to do my best in everything I do. I want to attract people into my ministry. But I walk the line between trying to have an entertaining ministry (so people will want to come to church) and staying true to God's Word and giving God all of the glory. Unfortunately, most of today's culture seems motivated by a 'good show' from the pulpit. I want my ministry to be more than a show. Real faith comes from truth. So I'm always seeking and asking God if I'm doing the right thing. I'm concerned about getting more people into my ministry because I intend to teach them the truth. I want everyone to be in church on Sunday morning, if not any other day. I want to attract more people, but I don't want my offering to be superficial and shallow. I want our worship and praise to be real. I struggle with it all.

I feel I need to be better prepared to preach. I have a difficult time reaching young adults in my church. I wonder if my preaching is effective.

Being a people-person, I have to guard against allowing others to influence my sermons. When I hear rumors from others that someone didn't like the sermon, I tend to withdraw and evaluate whether the criticism is justified. I have to constantly check these feelings and understand that I must please God. If he is leading and guiding my ministry, that should be enough. There's a definite line between preaching what God has instructed and preaching what people want to hear. We need to preach the Word of God when it calls for repentance for ourselves or those under our guidance.

I want to love the flock as well as lead them into spiritual growth. But it's a struggle. I hope I'm doing what needs to be done. Each sermon has to speak to me first, and then I can apply that truth to others. In Bible college, we studied about being a people-pleaser versus a God-pleaser, and that study was a spiritual breakthrough for me.

My church thinks my preaching is too old fashioned and not up-to-date. I sometimes wonder if they're right.

I strive to be relevant and reach people but, at the same time, I want to be biblical. That creates a lot of tension in my pulpit.

PREACHING WITH THE TIMES

As we saw in the previous chapter, both churches and church members face drastic and swift changes as the culture around them changes. Many pastors expressed fears and concerns about the future of preaching God's Word in the church.

I fear that preaching (expository preaching⁴) is becoming a thing of the past, that other things (drama, music, events, etc.) will replace the proclamation of the Word of God. I already see

this happening in churches today. The desire for entertainment and emotional response has become primary in many churches.

I'm greatly concerned about the dumbing-down of the evangelical pulpit sermon. Shallow theology that feels good and 'felt needs' are catastrophic to the gospel.

Today's culture wants to be entertained, not led in worship. They don't seem to know what worship means!

Church growth gimmicks have replaced expository preaching, and they are putting thousands of souls on the broad way that leads to destruction. Way too many people are attracted by fun and excitement, and seem to have no interest in preaching that has substance.

I'm frightened by all the churches that have converted to seeker-type services, the new worship music, 'friendly' sermons, etc. Too many pastors are being told by others that their churches 'will not grow and will surely die' if they don't convert. Yet, if they do decide to convert, they will most likely antagonize (and run off) many of their strongest church supporters and contributors. It seems to be a no-win situation, and I'm greatly concerned.

I see a genuine lack of understanding by Christians today of the church's purpose. To many, the church has become just another institution within the American society, rather than the place to hear the preaching of God's Word, deepen faith, gain strength from people through life belief, and serve and honor God.

I find it disconcerting that our society and culture is changing so rapidly. So many people today want to be entertained in worship services, and many don't want to hear the truth. So there's the daily challenge to study God's Word so that when I preach I can keep it simple and applicable to life.

PULPIT CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS

Pastors said some of their challenges in preaching are:

- Keeping sermons fresh and yet scripturally based
- Preparing sermons that meet the spiritual needs of the congregation
- Preaching week after week without becoming dry
- Being evangelistic in their sermons while still teaching mature Christians

One pastor explained his struggle to help his mature older members adjust to the realities of communicating the gospel today.

I pastor in a rural area where the culture is very conservative. Some church members still want to do church like they did in the 1950s. Since I've been pastor, I've been trying to encourage and lead them to realize that we must never change the message (the gospel), but we must change our method of reaching the lost. This has been frustrating over the past year, but I believe most are coming around.

No Time to Prepare

As noted in earlier chapters, most pastors wish they had more sermon preparation time. They need regular and uninterrupted solitude to pray, read, study, and write sermons that will proclaim God's Word to their congregations, yet time for such is always limited by many other pastoral duties . during the week. Pastors told me they often worried about "getting it right" and "not misleading anyone with incorrect theology." As H. G. Mackay has reminded us, "Accuracy is essential in the ministry of the Word. It is a solemn thing to misquote the Almighty!"⁵

Translating the Mystery

The second preaching problem comes when a preacher tries to make preaching and worship totally logical, simple, and devoid of any mystery. It cannot be done, as God Almighty is Mystery, and that often causes tension for the preacher.

Mark Galli of *Christianity Today* writes: “Worship that doesn’t in some ways leave a large space for transcendence and mystery is not worship of the God of the Bible, who when asked to name Himself — to explain His essence — said rather truculently, ‘I am who I am.’ ” He continues: “For all the good that seeker-friendly services do, they will not make a lasting difference if they don’t also traffic in the seeker-unfriendly, the incomprehensible.” [6](#)

A Vast and Varied Audience

A third preaching problem happens when pastors stop to realize the great diversity of the congregation they must preach to. Men and women, of all ages and stages of life, working in a variety of occupations, some employed and some unemployed, living various lifestyles, married or divorced or single or widowed or remarried, of all faiths and belief backgrounds, some spiritually mature, some spiritually immature, some sick, some depressed, some grieving, some dying, some with children, some without children, some infertile and desperately wanting children, some emotionally stable and some not, some with PhDs and some who are high school dropouts, some rich and some poor, some in debt and some destitute, some with elderly parents and some with no known parents at all. To that great diversity add children from preschool to teenager scattered throughout the sanctuary, each with their own uniqueness and level of education.

Somehow, when the pastor climbs into the pulpit, he must preach a God-inspired, biblically accurate message that “speaks” to

everyone in attendance. The sermon must be simple enough for a school child, edgy enough for a teenager, learned enough for the PhD, sophisticated enough for the spiritually mature, understandable enough for the spiritually immature, encouraging enough for the sick and grieving, hope-offering to the dying, practical to the unemployed, supportive to the newly divorced, and, of course, it must be meaningful to all, offensive to none, *and* politically correct!

The pastor must also take gender into consideration. He has heard that “men are from Mars, and women are from Venus,” that “men are like waffles, women are like spaghetti.” Bottom line, he knows that they hear and perceive words in different way, that certain words carry harmful or emotionally explosive baggage and don’t communicate well to either one gender or the other.

In her book, *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, Dr. Alice P. Mathews describes the ways each gender might interpret a text. “To be effective,” she explains, “the minister must not only communicate a biblically sound theology but also put the message into the differing life experiences of men and women in the pews. For example, when you preach about pride, men are more likely to objectify it as striving for position in the marketplace or the church. Women, however, may confuse what you are saying with legitimate self-esteem. It is the same message, but if it is not applied specifically, it may lead to very different results.”⁷

While researching and writing my book *What Women Wish Pastors Knew*, I talked with many women who gave me specific recommendations for pastors when they preached to women:

pastors when they preached to women:

- Women are weary of human-centered entertainment in the pulpit that replaces biblical preaching.

- . Women need their pastor to apply God's Word to their everyday lives.
- . Women need compassion from their pastor — there are hurting women in the pews.
- . Women want more female biblical characters and female-oriented illustrations in sermons.
- . Women desire respect from the pulpit — no demeaning comments, female-insulting jokes, or female stereotyping.⁸

As you can see, preparing and preaching sermons that speak to everyone who sits in the pew is a tall order! One might even call it impossible. Thus it's no wonder so many pastors feel inadequate for so great a task.

THE RESPONSE

Pastors told me that they often prepared Sunday's sermon with fear and trembling. Then they preached their hearts out in the pulpit, with the hope . that they were bringing a message that was instructive, meaningful, communicative, and biblically accurate before they stepped down to meet and greet church members and visitors.

What did many of them encounter?

- .*Criticism* — about the sermon text, style of preaching, or incorrect pronunciation
- .*No comment at all* — no affirmation, no critique
- .*Generic responses* — the “good sermon, pastor” that comes void of sincerity

.Not so much as a smile — passing on through to get to the parking lot, with blank expressions and apathy

During the sermon, these pastors looked out into the congregation and saw various church members sleeping, dreaming, staring at their watches, whispering, and turning their heads to notice every little youngster leaving the sanctuary to visit the restroom. At the end of the sermon, they gave an altar call and no one came.

And the next Sunday, they know they'll have to do it all over again.

However, no matter how frustrating and disheartening preaching to an inattentive or snoring congregation can be, the pastor has done the job God called him to do. He has, as God's "exegetical escort," ushered his hearers into the presence of God and given them the Word. He can then leave them in the throne room of God and let God transform them.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about their preaching?

- . Preaching is the most enjoyable and also the most difficult job in his position as pastor.
- . Preaching God's Word is an awesome responsibility, one he takes very seriously.
- . A pastor's primary goal in preaching is to please God.
- . Each week he spends vast amounts of time in prayer, study, and preparation to bring his church members Bible-based, meaningful, and life-instructive sermons.

- .. He shows his love for his congregation by faithfully and consistently feeding them God's Word.
- . The responsibility and challenge of preaching God's Word can often create frustration, fear, and tension in his life.
- . He sometimes questions his own ability to bring fresh, relevant, substantive, life-changing sermons to his people.
- . He often worries about the future of preaching and the church.
- . He struggles to adequately communicate to every individual in the congregation.
- . He needs member encouragement as he strives to keep his sermons consistently Christ-centered, biblically accurate, and God-honoring.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Pray especially for your pastor as he studies and prepares his weekly sermons. Tell him, through an email or handwritten note, you are praying for him.
- . Respect your pastor's time. Be careful not to needlessly interrupt him during his scheduled sermon preparation and study time.
- . Encourage him as he seeks to communicate with so diverse a congregation.
- . Listen attentively and carefully as your pastor preaches. Keep eye contact and let him know you are hearing him.
- . After the worship service, tell him what you appreciated about his sermon.

- Write him a note or email of encouragement and gratitude as he begins preparing the next week's message.

- Thank him often for his dedication to the task of preaching God's Word.

CHAPTER 12: “I’M CONCERNED ABOUT EVANGELISM”

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:18 – 20

DURING THE WEEK of February 1, 2008, the Call2All North American Global Congress (a movement organized by the Global Pastors Network, founded by the late Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright) convened more than five hundred pastors, organizational presidents, CEOs, and ministry leaders at the Northland Church in Long-wood, Florida. Their mission? To brainstorm strategies and pull together ideas and resources for reaching the world’s two billion people who do not know Jesus, and thus to fulfill his Great Commission of Matthew 28:18 – 20.

Speaking at the event, the Rev. Bobby Welch, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, emphasized that “church leaders and their congregations must make winning souls the priority.” This congress was the first of forty congresses that, during the next three years, will be held in different regions of the world.^{[1](#)}

That’s good news!

Jesus gave his church a commission to win the lost world for him. Yet, according to researchers David Barrett and Todd Johnson, “27.7 percent of the Earth’s population — 1.8 billion people — remain not just outside the faith, but completely unevangelized.” They state that

“by 2025, the unevangelized will still constitute 26 percent of the world’s population — some 2 billion people.”[2](#)

Most of the pastors I surveyed told me they personally took Jesus’ commission very seriously, but were discouraged in their efforts as a local church to reach a lost population for Jesus Christ.

IS IT THE PASTOR’S FAULT?

As in many other areas of ministry, pastors were quick to take the blame for their church’s lack of evangelism enthusiasm and concern for the world’s lost people.

I seem to lack the ability to develop my church into a missional church.

I am still [young] in my evangelical development in terms of witnessing. I do it regularly, but always feel I need to do it more. It’s in these areas that I feel like I lead people least. When I’ve sought to lead, few have followed.

I can’t seem to get my church to understand the call of Christ to reach others in the world.

We’re a wealthy white church in a town that’s over 80 percent poor and African-American. I’ve preached on [evangelism], tried to model it, and cried over it, but (after five years) we’re still not scratching the surface of our own town. What am I doing wrong?

Our church suffers from my poor leadership in missions and evangelism.

I’m very weak in personal evangelism, consequently I cannot help the members in this area; so I guess it’s my fault

that we don't grow and win others to Christ.

I'm failing my church in evangelism, not doing enough, not being effective, not leading others to be effective. And I don't know what to do about it!

As hard as I try, I can never do enough in the area of evangelism and missions.

I could use some encouragement in any form. What is increasingly disappointing to me is the ever-growing sense that my role as a . pastor and evangelist is of diminishing importance. I feel less needed now, even though I believe that I'm more needed than ever . . . not me, but the missional gifts and pastoral calling God has made available through my life.

IS IT THE CONGREGATION'S FAULT?

Some pastors blamed their congregation's inability to catch and share the ministry vision for world evangelization. What is a ministry vision? Researcher George Barna defines it as "a clear mental image of a preferable future, imparted by God to His chosen servants, based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances."³

Many of the pastors surveyed confessed that their congregations didn't really understand how important evangelism was to their hearts.

I wish my members knew that God has given me a vision for them, our church, and our community.

I wish my church members understood my vision of the Great Commission — my hopes and dreams related to church ministry. Like the apostle Paul, I have great concerns for the

church and the direction of its ministry to the members, the lost, and the community.

Others pastors told me about the disinterest in their congregations for world missions and evangelism.

I wish my members knew how frustrating it is to hear them pray and talk about the importance of evangelism, outreach, and mission, and then see that they're not willing to do anything about it.

My members show little interest in personal visitation to reach children for Bible study and to reach others in personal evangelism.

My church lacks a commitment and faithfulness to God through the work of missions and evangelism. I'm not sure what to do about it.

My people will turn out for some fun event, yet very few show up to go out and tell people that Jesus loves them.

My church puts little or no importance on missions and evangelism. It just doesn't seem to concern anyone in my congregation.

I fear people in my church have no real concern or burden for the lost.

Like most churches, my congregation is experiencing few or no conversions, no growth or church planting.

One pastor shared his heart and his concerns about the future of the church.

I worry about the destiny of the church! Is what I'm doing now going to be enough for the future? Am I continuing to build

on a foundation that'll be secure and stable for the generation yet to come? Will there even be a generation yet to come to this church? In my church, young people are no-shows. Old people are faithful, but lack the zeal or willingness at times to change. Who will I pass the baton to? 'Lord, please don't let me grip it too long, and, Lord, please don't let my vision fade in such a way that I miss the ones that are coming up to take hold of the future church.' I believe it's common for old pastors to sometimes lose keenness of eyesight . . . I certainly don't want to become spiritually blind.

Another pastor was saddened by the lack of mission emphasis in his church, but blamed neither himself nor his congregation.

I wish my church members knew how rarely I see any real fruit from what I've labored to plant and cultivate. I don't believe it's poor planting on my part or a lack of receptivity on theirs. It's just that so many investments made in the soil of human hearts take time — and lots of it.

WHERE ARE THE MISSIONAL CHRISTIANS?

Pastors told me they saw few Christians “on fire for missions” anymore.

Why? They believed many of today's Christians were:

Self-consumed.

Due to the increasing change of our culture, people are becoming even more self-consumed, and therefore participation in missions and evangelism through giving, going, and praying is decreasing.

Self-seeking.

They tend to want to be 'inward' rather than 'outward.' They are more self-seeking than seeking to serve others. There's very little thought given to evangelism and outreach projects in our church.

Lacking in interest.

I see a tremendous lack of interest in evangelism and missions among our church's young people.

Conflicted.

What will it take to wake up the 'sleeping giants' of our churches and denominations? We seem more concerned with fighting among ourselves than working in the fields where God has placed us. I don't see the church or the denominations doing missions and evangelism very well at all.

Lukewarm and cold.

I fear people in church no longer have a real concern or burden for the lost.

Just maintaining ministry, not impacting culture.

I'm concerned that the average church is simply maintaining its ministry rather than impacting its community. If so, in the end, we'll see dead churches, and more and more people dying without Christ.

Just "average" Christians, not spiritual warriors.

Christians and churches today just don't seem to put much importance on missions and evangelism.

New studies show that American Christians do think of themselves as just “average” when it comes to the specific dimensions of their spiritual life. According to a recent research by George Barna, “the highest self-rated dimensions [among American Christians] were ‘maintaining healthy relationships,’ ‘serving other people,’ ‘worshiping God,’ and ‘leading their family spiritually.’ ”

Barna notes: “Predictably, the lowest self ranked categories [among American Christians] were ‘knowing the content of the Bible’ and ‘sharing their faith.’ ”

“Americans are generally satisfied with being ‘average’ in their spiritual maturity,” Barna concludes. “Most people do not feel they are learning enough about God, the Christian faith, or their role in the world — and most of them don't seem to care.”⁴

Yet, as the Call2All North American Global Congress and other such events illustrate, God's Spirit is still at work among his people, who are beginning to come together to fulfill Christ's Great Commission. “With the same Lord and the same cause and the same world, we have to work together to reach the lost,” said Lynn Green, international chairman of Youth With a Mission, in her address at the event.⁵

May more and more pastors, church leaders, and congregations catch the vision that winning souls is the church's priority.

SURVEY SUMMARY

What do pastors wish church members knew about world missions and evangelism?

- . Pastors take the Great Commission very seriously, but are sometimes discouraged in their efforts, as a local church, to reach a lost population for Jesus Christ.
- . They often feel they aren't doing enough to involve their people in evangelism outside the church walls.
- . It frustrates pastors when their church lacks a commitment and faithfulness to God through the work of missions and evangelism. They need and welcome encouragement and help in this area.
- . They worry about the future of the church when they see few or no conversions in their own congregations, little growth, and no church planting efforts birthed through their ministries.
- . Pastors yearn to work with their church members to impact the culture around them for Christ and win souls to him.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- . Learn about and support your pastor's vision for the church, because his vision will be the starting point for true ministry in your church.[6](#)
- . Take an active interest in what your church, pastor, and denomination are doing to reach the unchurched for Christ. Join them in their mission endeavors. Encourage other church members to get involved in mission work.
- . Start church study groups that meet regularly to study the world's various religious beliefs and to research ways to become more effective in witnessing and world evangelism.
- . Send your pastor and church leaders on an international mission trip — paid for by the church, if possible. Invite interested church

members to go along through their own means or by raising support.⁷

- Encourage your pastor to make evangelism and missions a priority in the church.

CONCLUSION: YOUR PASTOR'S CALLING

CHAPTER 13: “THERE’S A REASON I’M STILL HERE”

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

THROUGHOUT THE PAGES OF THIS book, hundreds of church pastors, from all ages and stages of life and ministry, from churches small and large and mega-big, and from more than forty different denominations, have honestly shared with you their hearts, their lives, their beliefs, and their stories.

Pastors have willingly and candidly revealed the problems they experience as church ministers — their often troubled personal and family lives; their limited financial resources; their individual health, faith, and spiritual concerns; their lack of job security; their responsibility to and for difficult members; their exhaustive workload; their unrelenting emotional stress; their constant time pressures; their 24/7 pastoral care schedules; as well as their private fears, frustrations, limitations, discouragements, and disappointments.

As I read through their survey responses, I asked myself the same question you yourself are probably asking by now: *Why on earth would any sane, intelligent person become a pastor?*

Because God himself calls them to ministry. That’s it. No other reason. God calls and they answer him with a bold, self-sacrificing yes!

So, while pastors' survey answers and voluntary comments often were heartbreaking, frustrating, complaining, or overly negative, they were also quick and eager to list all the delightful aspects of their vocation — the joys, the excitement, the amazing rewards. I have purposely saved their most enthusiastic responses for this final chapter.

PASTORS ARE GOD-CALLED MINISTERS

Church pastors are not hired hands, paid chaplains, or employed workers. They are not the church members' personal employees either. Church committees do not call ministers to pastoral work. *God* calls pastors. He alone issues the call. Pastors don't choose the ministry, God chooses the ministers!

Some pastors eagerly respond to God's call; others are more reluctant. Some, like the Old Testament's Jonah, hear the call and run the other way. God calls pastors to a special vocation — that of shepherd. The Latin word for vocation (*vocatio*) means "calling." And God leads his called shepherds to a specific flock of people: the local church.

One of my favorite people, Dr. James Earl Massey, writes about his call from God to ministry:

I did not choose the ministry; it was divinely chosen for me, and I was summoned to it through an experience of call that is as fresh in my memory now as when it first happened. I had not planned to be a minister, but a musician, a classical pianist. All the signs along the path of my planning pointed to a musical career, not being a preacher. But it was not to be so, and for reasons known only to God.^{[1](#)}

As Dr. Massey worshiped on a Sunday in 1946, in a Detroit Church of God, he heard a voice speaking within his consciousness:

“I want you to preach!” the voice said.²

It was a strange but sure happening. The Voice both disturbed me and settled me. The message was so forceful and the meaning was so clear. I knew I would have to say yes, and I did. . . . It was all so graphic to my inner sight, and so gripping upon my mind and spirit. In all the years which have transpired since that holy hour, I have never had any reason to reinterpret what happened to me during that great listening moment of grace. The Voice that called me was so clear, and its bidding, though gentle, bore the unmistakable authority of a higher realm. Since that time of encounter . . . I have known the work to which my head, heart, and hands were to be devoted.³

Dr. James Earl Massey gave up his human vocational plans on that Sunday in 1946, and has served God in dedicated ministry to this day. And God has used him in remarkable ways to touch lives for his kingdom. He has certainly touched my life!

We need to understand God’s call on a person’s life, as well as honor and respect it. Pastors must respond to a higher authority than the church’s deacons, committees, and members.

THERE IS SATISFACTION IN MINISTRY

Over and over, pastors told me they experienced deep satisfaction when they responded to God’s call to ministry. They said the work of shepherding God’s people (even with the inevitable problems) proved extremely gratifying. They used the word “joy” when they described finding God’s ultimate purpose for their lives.

Joy is a little word with a huge meaning! It refers to feelings of great happiness or pleasure, especially of an elevated or spiritual kind. Lying at the root of responding to God’s call to ministry, joy

comes from having a definite place in God's work and kingdom, participating with all the saints from centuries past in work that will last: eternal work. And even though that joy may often be clouded with ecclesiastical frustrations, the joy still lives as the basic foundation of a pastor's calling.

Scripture speaks often about joy. It tells us to "be joyful always" (2 Thesalonians 5:16); to "shout for joy to the Lord" and to come before God with "joyful songs" (Psalm 100:1 – 2); and even to "consider it pure joy" whenever we face trials of many kinds (James 1:2).

The apostle Paul asked the Philippian congregation to "make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (Philippians 2:2). Their love and unity brought great joy to Paul. From prison, Paul wrote to his dear friend and fellow worker Philemon, telling him "your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints" (Philemon 7). Philemon's ministry to his fellow church members made Paul both joyful and encouraged.

John wrote to his dear friend, Gaius, about what brought him joy. "It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to . the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 3 – 4).

On the survey, I asked pastors a simple, direct question: "What brings you the greatest joy in ministry?" And, in turn, they answered with hundreds of responses — far too many to fit into one brief chapter. But in each reply, their joy shone through.

My hope is that this chapter will show the depth and extent of a pastor's joy as he or she loves, works with, counsels, preaches to, teaches, and fellowships with the church congregation. In fact, those things that brought Paul and John such great joy — even among the

hardships and disappointments of ministry — are the same things that continue to bring joy to today's pastors.

Please allow me to step out of the way so you can hear for yourselves the pastors' joyful hearts as *they* explain why on earth they became pastors.

A Love for Jesus Christ

I want to be there for people on God's behalf as he's always there for me.

Joy comes from knowing the Lord's presence in my life.

I love Jesus and I'm joyful when I see transformation — tangible evidence of people changing into a greater likeness of Jesus Christ. Transformation even in the small areas — like a victory over some sin, a change of habit, a change of attitude — all of these speak to me of the gospel's impact and my role of teaching and preaching, correcting and rebuking, loving and caring for my flock.

A Desire to Obey God's Call

I'm thankful for the joy of being a pastor. My ministry has been blessed with many wonderful people.

I believe the call to be a pastor is by far the greatest call on earth. I celebrate it!

Joy is knowing I'm in the center of God's will for my life, knowing that he is receiving glory because of my obedience to him, and seeing lives changed for the glory of God.

A Longing to Please God with Their Lives

Joy comes from hearing at the end of a service that the message blessed someone. It reaffirms to me that God and I are on the same page.

What joy I have when people come to Christ, and God allows me to walk with them through the steps of repentance and faith! I love to see church members show interest in evangelism, and take steps to become better equipped to effectively witness to others.

It makes me so happy to overhear a church member actually talking about a message or Bible study, knowing they got something out of what was said — that they ‘got it.’

A Love for God’s People

As the apostle John said: ‘I have no greater joy than to know my children are walking in truth.’ To see change in the lives of people, to see the light bulb turn on, is what makes pastoring worthwhile.

I love to see people commit their lives to God through faith and to the church.

When I see a new Christian come into the church, it brings such happiness to my heart! And I especially enjoy watching small children learn what it means to worship an all-powerful God!

A Passion to See God’s People Grow in Christ

I rejoice when a life is changed by Christ, when someone steps out and serves or leads, and is rewarded by the experience.

It's fulfilling when I watch people grow as disciples of Christ. I like to 'turn the light on' for someone in his or her understanding of the Bible, and how it relates to our life in real and practical ways.

I feel the greatest joy when I see people come to Christ, and when they move past elementary teachings to grow deep in the Lord. It thrills my heart when they grow spiritually.

A Yearning to Minister to Others

Great satisfaction comes from ministering to those in need. Hospital and shut-in calls, sitting with families in ERs and surgical waiting rooms. I also serve as a chaplain to both our local police and sheriff departments — a role that allows me to minister to people in crisis moments.

I greatly enjoy preaching and knowing people have learned about God and are changed (if even a small amount) by that message. I find tremendous joy in counseling a hurting person and seeing a difference made in that life. I enjoy ministering to people during the significant times in their lives — births, marriages, deaths, crises, celebrations, etc. I feel humbled and joyful when people welcome me into the intimate inner circle of their family.

I dearly love my congregation, and I want nothing more than to see them become like Jesus. To watch people trust Christ, and then see them grow in their faith, is one of the greatest joys in my life and calling.

A Love for the Work and Mission of the Church

I revel in the excitement of leading someone to Christ, or watching children when I've been teaching them, and, when

they finally get it, to see their faces light up with understanding.

I love our church, and I'd be happy if God would allow me to spend the rest of my life as pastor right here!

I enjoy seeing people do something well for God. It gives them such pleasure to serve him.

A Desire to Raise Up Ministers

I watch with great anticipation as people grow in their faith, walk with the Lord, and then fulfill their unique call to ministry and mission.

It brings me deep joy to see people fully trusting God and doing things for other people.

I love to watch my people serving others in ways that significantly impact the community and world — not just our own church community.

MORE REASONS FOR JOY

These aforementioned are among the reasons a man or woman answers positively God's call to church ministry — the reasons pastors put up with the everyday frustrations, disappointments, and discouragements that seem to come with the job!

Notice too how some of the pastors finished the following survey statements:

I live to see . . .

.. . people practice real Christlike behavior — loving the unlovely, getting out of their comfort zones and serving God, being empowered by the Spirit, and seeking to please God alone.

.. . people get saved, and families change and be transformed by the power of the Lord.

.. . new people in our church integrating and getting involved in more than just Sunday worship.

I wish people knew . . .

.. . the elation I feel when I hear the belly laugh of a happy preschooler, or when an adult asks a question about Scripture and comes to a new understanding of God.

.. . the joy of seeing genuine change take place when a non-Christian discovers the faith-connection, gives her life to Christ, and becomes complete. There's nothing better than that!

.. . how much of a blessing they really are to me, how happy and content I am here, and how pleasant it is to be their pastor.

In my ministry, I enjoy . . .

.. . ministering to the precious people in my small church, and doing my best in the Lord to give them the warmest and most meaningful shepherding I can provide.

.. . watching the Lord build within some of his people a greater passion for himself.

.. . having the opportunity to teach people the Bible, and showing them how to have a closer relationship with God.

.. . studying and teaching God's Word, and observing how people are allowing the Word to change their lives.

.. . having people confide in me and trust me with their heart's concerns.

.. . counseling people and seeing them healed.

.. . preaching, leading, reaching people, doing missions, reaching a plan or goal, mentoring younger colleagues, spending time with members, performing the ordinances.

.. . liturgy, preaching, teaching, pastoral visits, pastoral conferences, healing ministry, weddings, funerals, baptisms, studying God's Word, etc.

.. . working with young people and seeing a difference happen in their lives by simply loving them, and caring for their hurts and needs. There are so many youth who have bad home situations that no one knows about. To be able to be there for them is awesome.

.. . helping people through troubled times in their lives, and the feeling I get when I know I've allowed God to use me. Nothing is better than that!

.. . delivering a sermon that communicates directly to my members' needs, and watching God use it to change a life.

.. . preaching! I have never preached for a living. But I have lived to preach!

.. . equipping people to serve Jesus through ministry and missions.

I get great satisfaction when I watch . . .

.. . God's people live out their faith. Some always come to the services. Others go to great lengths to minister to friends who are sick or troubled. Others plan and organize functions of the church. Others are always there to help. No two are alike, and none fit into a mold, but each is precious and appreciated.

.. . new Christians on fire for Jesus and hungry for the Word. Their joy is contagious and a great source of encouragement to me in my own ministry. They realize how blessed we are to be forgiven by God. To see their prayers answered inspires the church and me.

.. . a lost soul accept Jesus.

.. . folks accept Christ publicly, be baptized, and serve the Lord with their lives.

.. . people put Christ first and foremost in their lives — and see 'holy living.'

As I read through these survey responses, I learned anew how unselfish pastors are. While the world's people may invest their energies in the pursuit of admiration, prestige, power, money, and material bonuses, pastors invest their lives in people.

For me, real joy is . . .

.. . seeing people in the church actually get it — when the light seems to come on and they understand what I've been teaching them! It's so satisfying when I see a real and genuine change made in their lives.

.. . witnessing to a person and leading them to a relationship with Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

.. . seeing people come to faith in Christ, and then seeing them grow in their walk with Christ each day. I enjoy seeing members tackle new tasks, and successfully accomplish what they thought they couldn't do.

.. . watching believers mature in their faith, and seeing young adults answer God's call into ministry or missions.

.. . seeing lives transformed from self-serving to self-denial; watching people change from victims to victors; witnessing the joy of people redeemed from death.

.. . watching the congregation respond to God's Word with joy and obedience. Seeing practical response and life change as a result of the ministry of the Word, application of biblical truth, and spiritual reintroduction.

.. . seeing a sinner saved, a saint serving, and all of us bringing honor to God.

.. . spending time studying the Bible in preparation for preaching, and the preaching event itself.

.. . being part of the counseling process, and seeing marriages restored and strengthened.

.. . seeing lay leaders mobilized and passionate in ministry and in the work of leadership.

.. . being with a Christian of deep faith as she lay dying, and seeing the end of a life of faithfulness and faith as I ushered her into the presence of God.

.. . loving people and helping them, especially when I experience real, honest relationships.

.. . welcoming new members, especially those willing to support the church program and minister to others.

.. . watching church members make genuine sacrifices of time, energy, and money for God's kingdom — with no desire for (or expectation of) public recognition.

.. . sharing with church families their joys and sorrows, and being there in their times of need with a listening ear, concern, and love.

.. . watching a young couple — who were considering divorce at one point — sit together in a pew, hold a hymn book between them, and work through their marital problems together.

.. . observing our members greet each other in a worship gathering, include new people in their groups without being asked, eat together, reconcile with each other, grow in Christ, relate to each other with Christian harmony, start to dream their own dreams and imagine their own ideas about how our church can serve others, live out what we say we believe doctrinally, experience success in church work/projects, build lasting relationships with Christ-loving church members, turn in the right direction after they are counseled, and enjoy belonging to God's church!

DESIRES, HOPES, AND DREAMS

We've just looked at what brings a church pastor joy. Now, for a moment, let me share with you just a few of the surveyed pastors' innermost desires, hopes, and dreams for himself, for you, and for the church.

Your Pastor's Desires

My genuine desire is to teach and disciple people.

I want to lead a vital, active church that's on fire for the Lord. I want us to grow together in spiritual maturity and move outside the walls of the church building to love and serve others so they might come to know Christ as their personal Savior. I want us to build a prayer life together that will impact our lives, and the lives of others for the building of God's kingdom. I pray I can be a humble servant-leader and follow Christ's example by deeply loving his flock, and training others to use their spiritual gifts to do ministry.

I wish my church members knew the depth of my desire to see our church become an asset to the expansion of God's kingdom.

Your Pastor's Hopes

I hope and pray our church will become mission-focused and always striving toward holiness.

My hope is that our church will be that body God wants it to be, and will fulfill his calling and will in our setting.

I genuinely hope our church will grow and become a godly influence to the hostile culture around us.

Your Pastor's Dreams

A dream is an ambition, idea, or goal. Everything worthwhile and eternal in God's kingdom begins with a God-given dream. To make dreams come true, we must step out in faith, take a risk, and trust God completely!

How passionately I yearn for the church to fulfill its calling to be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world'!

The desire of my heart is to take this church to the spiritual level God wants it to be.

I dream of leading and pastoring a group of people who embrace spiritual gifts, their own calls to ministry, and start taking kingdom-living more seriously than they take their own comforts, likes, and preferences. I also dream of doing team ministry with loyal, loving friends who also love Jesus and his ways more than anything else — people I can really do life with, even when things are hard.



In closing, I trust that, throughout the pages of this book, you've been given some special insights into the lives, hopes, and dreams of church pastors. Whether you are a church member, a church staff member, a deacon, an elder, or someone who just loves and admires pastors, I hope you'll take many of these thoughts and suggestions to heart, honoring God as you reach out and minister to your own church pastor.

The church has a definite purpose in our changing culture, and God has chosen and called special men and women to unselfishly shepherd his people. Love, encourage, and support your local pastor! And, as you faithfully minister to him or her, remember these words from my longtime friend and mentor J. I. Packer:

All churches are flawed, but even through those flaws, God uses the church to sand off the rough edges of our characters, to reveal his love through the diversity of his bonded people, to teach us about himself through Scripture read and preached, to energize us as we each develop our

unique skills in his service, to purify us through the vulnerability of confession, to inspire us through those who have walked God's path further than we, to spur us toward love and good works, and to draw us closer to himself and each other through our united prayers, all of this for the praise of his own glory, which he displays in and through the togetherness of his church.[4](#)

Amen!

SURVEY SUMMARY

What pastors wish church members knew about their joys, desires, hopes, and dreams:

- . As difficult as ministry can be, pastors experience great joy when they say yes to God's call and serve him in the work of the local church. It's their way of loving and pleasing Christ.
- . They love God's people, want to minister to them, and yearn to see them grow in Christ and impact their world for him.
- . Their joy comes as they invest their lives in God's people, not from the world's prestige, material goods, or paychecks.
- . Pastors greatly enjoy and find fulfillment in eternal work done for, with, and by God's people.
- . They have hopes, desires, and dreams for the church, but cannot accomplish them alone.

What You Can Do to Help Your Pastor

- As a church, appreciate and value your pastor's commitment to God's call in ministry. Plan times to celebrate his ministry as a church family. Surprise him with special occasions that commemorate ministry milestones, anniversaries, accomplishments, and the spiritual history of your church.

- Plan times to pray together for (and with) your pastor as a church family — and don't forget to ask your pastor how you can best pray for him.

- Talk with your pastor (individually or as a congregation) about what brings him joy and fulfillment in church ministry. Encourage him to openly share his dreams for your church and its service to the world.

- Listen and be open to your pastor's dreams and new ideas. Help your pastor implement goals that would honor God and better equip your church to reach out to the world in Christ's name.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20 – 21

NOTES

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8. See Denise George, *What Women Wish Pastors Knew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 133.

CHAPTER 12: “I’M CONCERNED ABOUT EVANGELISM”

1. Michelle A. Vu, “Christian Leaders Strategize to Reach Two Billion People,” *Christian Post Reporter*, February 1, 2008: www.christianpost.com/article/20080201/31047_Christian_Leaders_Strategize_to_Reach_2_Billion_People.htm (accessed February 1, 2008).

2. Stan Guthrie, “What’s Next: Missions,” *Christianity Today*, October 4, 2006: www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?ct/2006/010/22.74.html (accessed October 5, 2006).

3. George Barna, *Church Marketing: Breaking Ground for the Harvest* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1992), 121.

4. “Worldviews,” Apologetics Resource Center, August 2006, 1.

5. Vu, “Christian Leaders Strategize.”

6. “For a Christian leader, vision is not to be regarded as an option. A person is chosen by God to move His people forward by (1) sharing God’s will for that people; (2) shaping them into a true community; and (3) participating in the work of the Gospel. Vision is part of the heartbeat of a leader; it is the insight that motivates his actions, shapes his thinking, defines his leadership and dictates his view of successful ministry.” Barna, *Church Marketing*, 120.

7. One pastor wrote about the value of short-term mission trips in his survey, saying: “Those investments will do more for the life of a local church and the overall health of a pastor and congregation than anything I know. Once they truly catch a ‘vision for the nations,’ that vision will become contagious to the rest of the church.”

CHAPTER 13: “THERE’S A REASON I’M STILL HERE”

1. James Earl Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage* (Anderson, Ind.: Anderson University Press, 2002), 52.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 53.

4. J. I. Packer, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 240.

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