



Appreciating Your Pastor

By Jason Janz • Originally Published on November 29, 2006

One of the side benefits of owning a site like SharperIron is that I get to scratch an itch that is a major burden of mine: helping pastors and church leaders. Outside of pastoral ministry, nothing in ministry gives me more satisfaction. Hearing their struggles, listening to their rebukes, directing them to resources, and getting to know them better have been one of my greatest joys of the last two years. However, my burden for them has increased tenfold. I have come to believe that pastors are America's greatest, yet most undervalued and underappreciated, men. It's no longer in style to respect the man of God. After all, with Swaggart and Haggard, why should anybody respect the clergy? I hope to answer that question.

On Paul's second missionary journey, he wrote a letter to the Thessalonians. He addressed many areas including the need to be faithful amidst persecution, to encourage them regarding those who have already passed away, and to address errors. He hit on moral laxity and laziness, and then he addressed their tendency not to respect their church leadership. The problems of the Thessalonians are present in today's church as well. I believe every church member should appreciate his pastor.

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (KJV).

Darrin Patrick, pastor of The Journey in St. Louis, in a recent podcast reported on a recent study by Focus on the Family. He reports the following:

- 1,500 pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, contention in churches, or

spiritual burnout.

- 50 percent of pastors will be divorced by the time they leave the ministry.
- 80 percent of pastors and 84 percent of spouses feel discouraged or unqualified in their roles as pastors.
- 50 percent are so discouraged they would leave if they could but have no other way to make a living.
- our out of five seminary and Bible school grads who enter the ministry will leave it in the first five years after graduation.
- 80 percent of spouses feel their spouse is overworked. 80 percent wish their husbands would leave the ministry.
- 80 percent of pastor's wives say the most destructive event that ever occurred in their marriage and family was the day they entered ministry.
- 70 percent of pastors fight depression.
- 40 percent have had an extramarital affair since starting ministry.
- 70 percent of pastors say that the only time studying the Word is when they are preparing a sermon.

So, perhaps you can see why we are encouraged by Paul to think about how we view and treat these vital people. Paul gives two reminders to church members regarding how they are to treat their pastors. He first tells them to know them and then he tells them to esteem them.

You must know your pastor.

"Know" carries the idea of appreciation. You are to know the value of this important "member of the family." Treat him like a member of your household. How do you "know" him better? Understand his job.

Know his labor among you. The idea here is that pastors who do their job well grow weary to the point of exhaustion in the ministry. The text means “to labor with wearisome effort.” George Barna reports that churchgoers expect their pastor to juggle an average of 16 major tasks. However, the Scripture describes pastors as elders, shepherds, and overseers. They should work themselves to exhaustion in the ministry of the Word and prayer.

Know his authority. God says that the pastor is “over” church members. He rules and presides over the flock. This presents a unique relationship. He is over the members of the church, but he is also “among” them. As brothers, pastors are “among” church members and as leaders, they are “over” them in the Lord.” This could be extremely difficult if church members do not understand this important concept. For a pastor to be “among” and “over” his flock demands Spirit-control. He can’t just be a “buddy” without also being an authority. Some then say that the pastor should not have close friends in the church and just work on being an overseer. However, that is not true to Scriptural teaching. Pastors must do both, and the congregation must allow him that ministry. Sadly, most pastors play it safe. Seventy percent of pastors do not have someone they consider to be a close friend.

Let’s look closer at the idea of authority. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.” Verse 17 adds, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” This authority is given to him by God. Second Corinthians 10:8 says, “For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed.”

We have all seen pastors who have abused their authority, and surely Judgment Day for them will be a sober occasion. Our church regularly attracts people who are fleeing such environments. However, the abuse of spiritual authority does not negate the truth of it. In today’s postmodern culture, I think many people view their pastor as some sort of spiritual advisor. They view him as some sort of Christian Dr. Phil but not their spiritual head. Spend some time thinking about your pastor as your true spiritual authority.

Know his role. The Bible says he is to admonish you.

This means to give instruction, to warn. Acts 20:31 describes the nature of this admonishment.

“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” A good pastor will instruct you and rebuke you—with tears. One author says that is to “put in mind,” implying not arbitrary authority, but gentle, though faithful, admonition (2 Tim. 2:14, 24, 25; 1 Pet. 5:3). In other words, a good pastor gets in your face. Someone once said, “Soft words make for hard people. Hard words make for soft people.” I have heard some church members complain on occasion, “Well, I feel like sometimes when he’s preaching, he’s preaching at me.” Pardon me, but isn’t that the point? Shouldn’t you always look at the preaching as if your pastor is doing that very thing?

Why was it necessary to say this to the Thessalonians? Easy. They didn’t respect their leaders. The Thessalonian church, having been newly planted, had novice ministers with perhaps only a few months of training. Paul only stayed in the city between three weeks and six months. Can you imagine pastoring after that kind of seminary crash course? In fact, the Thessalonians were the ones who received the sideswipe insult that the Bereans were more noble than they were because they searched the Scriptures. Inexperienced and immature pastors make mistakes. To tell you the truth, seasoned and mature pastors make mistakes. You should respect your pastor, not based on whether he gets every call right, but because of the nature of the office God has called him to fill.

This does not mean that every spiritual leader is always right. Abraham, Moses, David, and even Peter made mistakes in their words and deeds. A wise pastor knows he is made of clay and admits when he is wrong or when he needs expert counsel.

Why did God choose for these words to be in the sacred text? Our tendency is not to appreciate the pastor. It’s always been that way—in Paul’s day and in ours. Our tendency is to lightly esteem his work. Our tendency is not to see ourselves as under his authority. He’s not just a mentor, friend, or a good preacher. He’s our spiritual authority.

You must hold him in the highest regard.

Paul elaborates on the character of your regard. He describes our regard as having to be “very high.” This

means “to extend beyond the prescribed bounds, to stretch out beyond measure.” In other words, we can’t love the man too much. Why should we hold him in high regard? For his work’s sake. Most will use this text to describe the nature of the pastor’s work; however, the most sobering aspect of a pastor’s work is the accounting he will give to the Lord. He not only gives an account the way every believer must; he also gives an account for how he leads and feeds the flock of God. Pastors have to give an account to the Bridegroom for how they took care of His bride. You should esteem the man very highly because of this sobering responsibility.

Sadly, many pastors never experience a ministry in a church where they are held in high regard. Respect for the clergy has diminished over the last several decades and sometimes deservedly so. However, we should not lump all pastors into the category of those who have abused their office.

As a result of this lack of esteem, I believe many pastors quit. The average tenure of a pastor is 3.6 years. H.B. London, Jr., noted that about 75 percent of religious leaders go through a period of stress so great that they consider quitting. London said, “The incidents of mental breakdown are so high that insurance companies charge about 4 percent extra to cover church staff members when compared to employees in other businesses.” Pastoral psychologist Archibald Hart recently observed, “Their strong religious beliefs mean they won’t kill themselves; they just spend their time wishing they were dead.” Barna has discovered that “pastors are the single most occupationally frustrated professionals in America.”

How can you regard him and esteem him highly? Many who apply this text will encourage you to write a thank-you note or to say a kind word. While that’s a nice gesture, I think it’s pretty lame. Your great grandma gets a nice card once a year.

To spark some ideas, here is a list that I found to be helpful.

- **Make sure you take care of him financially.** Most churches don’t know where to begin when it comes to talking about finances. If you are a deacon or elder, let me encourage you to take it upon yourself to make sure your pastor has an

adequate salary. If you are not in leadership, copy this article and give it to all of your leaders. To help you in the process of making sure you are compensating your pastor adequately, you can purchase the *2007 Compensation Handbook for Church Staff* that gives a comprehensive overview of appropriate salaries for ministers. It takes into account geographical area, church attendance, education, experience, etc. You can purchase it here¹. You can also check out this online study² of Southern Baptist Churches in 2006 that placed the average salary of a pastor in America in a church of 100 at \$39,787 with a total pay package of \$47,315.

Some may regard this kind of talk as unspiritual. However, I think there is rarely something as unspiritual as not taking care of God’s man. And, by the way, many times pastors will overlook this area, but the pastor’s wife usually bears the brunt of a church who will not adequately take care of their pastor. Love the couple enough to do whatever is necessary to bring their salary up to an appropriate level.

- **Regard him as God’s messenger** (1 Cor. 4:1; Gal. 4:14). Paul says in Galatians that the Galatians received him as an angel of God. Sadly, in many churches a pastor is not just a preacher. He is expected to be an administrator, teacher, fundraiser, janitor, counselor, arbitrator, leader, and visionary. He works in a high-expectation environment where he is constantly scrutinized and rarely applauded. Regard him as God’s messenger and give him the space to spend at least half of his day studying the Word and praying for the flock.
- **Attend to his instructions.** “The empty pew has an eloquent tongue,” said one writer. “To the preacher, it says, ‘Your sermon is not worthwhile.’ The empty pew is a weight. The occupied pew is a wing.”
- **Follow his holy example** (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). “Be followers together of me.” The most encouraging thing you can do is to love God and love your neighbor as your pastor does.

¹<http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/20cohaforchs1.html>

²<http://server.kybaptist.org/compstudy>

- **Pray for him and his wife** (Rom. 15:30). “Ye strive together with me in *your* prayers to God for me.” Pastors get stressed out and need your prayers. One year the Southern Baptists paid out \$64 million in stress-related claims, second in dollar amounts only to maternity benefits.
- **Give him joy** (2 Cor. 1:14; 2:3). “As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also *are* ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.”
- **Help him** (Rom. 16:9). “Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ.” I heard a quote this year that the average pastor leaves a church over conflicts with two or three families regardless of church size. In one study, 40 percent of pastors reported serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month. Most pastors lay awake and worry over the families who are causing them problems. You have no idea how much encouraging words and actions mean to him when he is under this type of burden.

The following article, titled “How to get rid of a pastor,” appeared in a church bulletin.

Not long ago a well-meaning group of laymen came from a neighboring church to see me. They wanted me to advise them on some convenient and painless method of getting rid of their pastor. I’m afraid, however, that I wasn’t much help to them. At the time I had not had the occasion to give the matter serious thought. But since then I have pondered the matter a great deal and the next time anyone comes for advice on how to get rid of the pastor, here’s what I’ll tell them. One, look the pastor straight in the eye while he’s preaching and say “amen” once in a while and he’ll preach himself to death. Two, pat him on the back, brag on his good points and he’ll

probably work himself to death. Three, dedicate your life to Christ and ask the preacher for some job to do, preferably some lost people you could win to Christ and he’ll die of heart failure. Four, get the church to unite in prayer for the preacher and he’ll soon become so effective that a larger church will take him off your hands.

Whatever level of appreciation you now have, increase it in love. That love means you seek your pastor’s best. That love means you overlook his weaknesses and frailties. That love means you speak well of him. That love means you encourage him. That love means you lift him up as a called man of God who has brought to you the truth. Paul concludes his exhortation by saying that this is the way to have peace in the church.

In conclusion, the reward for a pastor is almost always mentioned in eschatological terms. Philippians 2:16 says, “Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” Make no mistake. A good pastor is laboring for a different type of reward than earthly kudos. However, nothing makes the journey more enjoyable than ministering in a congregation that loves their pastor as he loves them. I was talking with a pastor a few weeks back who was struggling with discouragement. He had left a successful business to oversee a fledgling flock. In 10 years, his leadership helped them get out of crippling debt, quadruple the church attendance, move into a building program, and internally strengthen discipleship and membership. He has not received a raise, and at his 10-year celebration, the church gave him a plaque and a cake. Thankfully, he will one day receive his due appreciation. First Peter 5:4 says, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

Please, appreciate your pastor.

This article as well as other news and discussion may be read at <http://sharperiron.org>. The mission of *SharperIron* is to edify Christian brothers and sisters by providing a place to publish and discuss news and ideas from a Christian, Biblical, Fundamentalist worldview.