

BIG TRUTH LITTLE BOOKS®

HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR

Derek Brown

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HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR

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To Bill Cook and Jeff Elieff
Two exemplary pastors for whom it was my privilege to
pray for nearly seven years

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SERIES PREFACE

Our mission with the *BIG TRUTH little books*® series is to provide edifying, accessible literature for Christian readers from all walks of life. We understand that it is often difficult to find time to read good books. But we also understand that reading is a valuable means of spiritual growth. The answer? Get some really big truth into some little books. These books may be small, but each is full of Scripture, theological reflection, and pastoral insight. Our hope is that Christians young and old will benefit from these books as they grow in their knowledge of Christ through His Word.

Cliff McManis, General Editor
Derek Brown, Series Editor

INTRODUCTION

You may not know it, but your pastor is a desperate man. He has been tasked by God to shepherd Christ's sheep with wisdom, courage, and tenderness, yet he often feels his own inadequacy, timidity, and tendency toward frustration. He is responsible to care for the souls of his people by way of preaching, teaching, and counseling, a task that often includes correcting and rebuking, so your pastor senses acutely his own need for Christ's forgiveness and sustaining mercy. His work requires that he exemplify mature Christian living, so he knows deeply his need for personal holiness. The task of rightly understanding and explaining God's Word demands careful, pain-staking study and prayer, so your pastor feels weekly the burden to labor diligently in the text of Scripture. He may never tell you so, but your pastor is a desperate man.

And until now, you may not have given much thought to your pastor's desperation. In my

experience I have found that few Christians really know what pastoral ministry entails. For some, the quip, “A pastor only works one day a week” may seem pretty close to the truth. Others view pastoral ministry as a helping profession (akin to professional counseling, but easier) where the pastor’s 35-40 hour workweek consists mainly of coffee-shop chats, a few staff meetings, and a little light reading and Bible study. Good stuff, but none of it too difficult. Because many people have such a truncated view of the pastoral ministry (a view that is, sadly, perpetuated by some lazy and incompetent pastors), they may find it difficult to pray for their pastor, if they feel compelled to pray for him at all.

But it is also the case that Christians can mistakenly conceive of pastoral ministry in categories that resemble corporate business models rather than biblical mandates for church leaders. That is, some Christians think of their pastors more as CEOs whose main job is to manage and expand the programs and overall influence of the corporation rather than shepherds who have been called to feed and protect sheep. Marketing, management, motivation, and resource acquisition are seen as the pastor’s primary responsibilities rather than

preaching, teaching, praying, and training other leaders.

It's not difficult to see that our view of the pastoral ministry will directly affect how we pray for our pastors. It is clear, then, that the answer is not merely to pray *more* for our pastor, but to pray for him according to God's Word. But it is also my belief that if we rightly understand our pastor's qualifications, his role and responsibilities, and the unique temptations that surround a shepherding ministry, we will not only pray more, we will pray in a way that strengthens, upholds, encourages, and richly blesses your pastor, his family, and his ministry.

Pastoral Longing and the Need for Prayer

As a pastor, I long for more holiness, more spiritual clarity, more biblical insight, more authenticity, more gospel fruit, more changed lives, more humility, and a deeper love for Christ's sheep. I recognize that these good gifts will come by way of God's Spirit as He uses the means of personal devotion, prayer, worship, and obedience to cultivate spiritual growth in my life. But Scripture is clear that God has composed His people in such a way that each member of the body is reliant upon every other member (see 1 Cor 12:12-27), and that intercession of one for

the other is vital for our spiritual health, both corporately and individually.

In this way my heart resonates with the great reformer Martin Luther who connected his spiritual vitality and well-being to the prayers of other believers. In a letter to Melanchthon in 1527, Luther tells his friend that his spiritual suffering, though significant, had begun to subside due to the prayers of others:

For more than a week I have been thrown back and forth in death and hell; my whole body feels beaten, my limbs are still trembling. I almost lost Christ completely, driven about one the ways and storms of despair and blasphemy against God. But because of the intercession of the faithful, God began to take mercy on me and tore my soul from the depths of hell.¹

In an earlier letter to Melanchthon, Luther, while struggling mightily with temptation and lethargy, wondered if his friend and others had ceased to pray for him. To Luther, the intercession of his people was a life and death issue. I can't help but agree.

Grounding Our Prayers in God's Word

As we see in the above quote from Luther, the subject matter of this book is of vital importance. But it's not enough to be moved to see the importance of praying for our pastor by a brief example from church history. We need be convinced from God's Word that it is both right and necessary to take seriously the responsibility to pray for those who exercise spiritual oversight in our local congregations.

In order to help us gain solid biblical footing on this topic, I begin in chapter 1 by answering the important question of why we should pray for our pastors. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I will recommend that we should pray for our pastors in light of their qualifications (chapter 2), their specific roles and responsibilities (chapter 3), and their unique pressures and temptations (chapter 4). By framing our discussion this way, my aim is that we will ground our prayers predominately in Scripture and thus have the confidence that we are praying for our pastors the way that God requires us to pray for our pastors. Such biblically informed prayer will lead to the fruit of healthy and effective churches (chapter 5). I will conclude the book with a few practical ideas on how to implement what you have learned from God's

Word over the past few chapters.

Some books that encourage us to pray for our pastors are not careful to draw their exhortations from Scripture or from a clear understanding of what pastoral ministry entails. Thus, their challenges qualify as little more than good ideas and do not carry the weight of biblical authority. When we pray for our pastors, we should have the confidence that we are praying according to God's will as it is revealed in Scripture.

In the following chapters we will find that Scripture not only gives us ample warrant and incentive to pray for our pastors, but also provides clear guidelines around which to frame our prayers. It is my hope that this book will lead many congregations into biblically-informed, Spirit-empowered prayer for their shepherds and that the fruit of such prayer will be holier pastors, healthier churches, happier Christians, and heartier missionaries.

Shepherds, Pastors, Elders, and Overseers

As you make your way through this book, you will notice that I use the words elder, pastor, shepherd, and overseer interchangeably. This word choice is deliberate. Scripture uses these words interchangeably because they each refer to

the same office. That is, an elder is a pastor, an overseer is an elder, and so on (see especially 1 Pet 5:1-4). What your particular church or denomination chooses to call the men who exercise spiritual leadership in your local congregation, however, will not deter you from profitably using this book. The qualifications, responsibilities, and particular pressures of pastoral ministry all apply to those who serve Christ's church in the recognized role of formal leadership.²

A Mini-Theology on Pastoral Ministry

It is my goal that this book not only serve as a guide to help you pray for your pastor, but as a small introduction to pastoral ministry as well. As I noted briefly above, my experience has brought me to conclude that many Christians are generally unaware of the qualifications for and responsibilities of a competent shepherding ministry. Therefore, I have chosen to linger over each pastoral qualification and responsibility rather than merely offer a few pithy suggestions for your prayer journal. Members of local congregations should be well informed about God's desire and design for pastoral leadership.

We now turn in chapter 1 to consider the question: Why should you pray for your pastor?

1

WHY SHOULD YOU PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR?

In the introduction I noted that pastors are in desperate need of prayer. In this chapter, I want to accomplish two things. First, I want to ask and answer a vital question: Does the Bible teach us to pray for our pastors? It might seem like a good idea to pray for your pastor, but does God through His Word really call us to such prayer? Quick preview: Yes, He does, and we should count it a high privilege to intercede on behalf of our shepherds.

Second, I want to help you grasp the tremendous benefits that flow from regularly praying for your pastor. Indeed, praying for your pastor could be one of the most productive

things you do during the day, for you will not only be serving your pastor and his family, but you will be serving everyone who sits directly under his ministry and those who enjoy derivative benefit from his ministry (on the radio or through books, etc.).

Does the Bible Call Us To Pray for Our Pastors?

While Scripture calls us repeatedly to devote ourselves to prayer (Phil 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17), it is also true that there is no explicit verse in the Bible that tells us to pray for our pastor. Nevertheless, when Scripture is taken as a whole it becomes abundantly clear that the responsibility to pray for one's pastor does fall upon the members of a local congregation for the following two reasons.

Intercessory Prayer is the Responsibility of All Christians

At basic, Christians are recipients of grace. Through the bloody sacrifice of Christ, all believers have been forgiven of their sin and declared righteous in God's sight. And, not only this, but—wonder of wonders—our union with the living Christ provides us open access to God's throne where we can, anytime, find “grace and

help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). Our Father, like a loving daddy, welcomes our requests and prayers, and waits eagerly to bless and help His people.

But God has composed a *people*, not mere individuals, and it is by His design that each of us would serve one another through intercessory prayer, not only approach the throne of grace for ourselves. God delights in our heart-felt requests for our brothers and sisters and for our sincere supplications for those who are currently outside the faith. We are given the model of intercessory prayer *par excellence* in Jesus Christ who regularly prayed for His people while on earth (Luke 22:32; John 17:1-26) and who intercedes for us at this very moment (Heb 7:25). The Spirit even provides an example of merciful intercessory prayer by praying for us when we don’t know how to pray (Rom 8:26-27).

The apostle Paul also provides a worthy example of intercessory prayer. He often informs the recipients of his letters that he prays regularly for them (see Rom 1:9; 1 Cor 1:14; Eph 1:15-18; 3:14-19; Phil 1:3-4; Col 1:3, 9; 1 Thess 1:2-3; 2 Thess 1:3, 11; Philem 1-6) while also indicating that he prayed fervently for the salvation of his unbelieving kinfolk (Rom 10:1).

Other leaders in the New Testament exemplified a commitment to intercessory prayer. Paul's companion Epaphras "struggled" in prayer for the sake of the Colossians, so that they might "stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col 4:12). The apostle John prayed fervently for his readers (3 John 9).

A commitment to prayer, then, won't consist exclusively of prayers for ourselves; rather, like Christ, the Spirit, and the apostles, we will pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will, as Paul instructs, "mak[e] supplication for *all* the saints" (Eph 6:19). We will also pray for those in positions of governmental authority, regardless of their Christian profession (1 Tim 2:1-3).

New Testament Leaders Requested Prayer from Their People

Yet, there is another thread of evidence in the New Testament that leads us to conclude that it is good and right to pray for our pastors. While it is the special responsibility for pastors to pray for their people (see Acts 6:4), it is also expected that God's people would pray for their leaders. Throughout the New Testament writings, we find multiple requests for prayer from the very apostles who exemplified a commitment to praying for others.

Paul, for example, often asked his people to pray for him, specifically with regard to his ministry. To the Corinthian church he pleaded, “You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many” (2 Cor 1:11). After instructing the Ephesian church to pray diligently for all the saints, he asked that they pray for him, “that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:19-20). Paul also asked the Colossians to go to their heavenly Father on his account.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak (Col 4:2-4).

In the case of Philemon, Paul assumed that his brother in Christ would be praying for the apostle’s safe arrival (Philem 1:22). In his first

letter to the saints in Thessalonica, Paul simply says, “Pray for us” (1 Thess 5:25). The author of Hebrews makes a similar request (Hebrews 13:18). In a subsequent epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul asks for blessing upon his ministry of the Word and for protection from gospel opponents: “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith” (2 Thess 3:1).

Beyond the two reasons discussed above, we can have confidence that Christ desires that we pray for our pastors for the following three reasons.

Praying For Your Pastor Benefits Your Pastor

When God’s people pray for their pastor, they are serving him in one of the most direct and meaningful ways possible. They are going directly to God to ask that He help their pastor fulfill his ministry and faithfully conduct the stewardship Christ has allotted him. As we will see in more detail in the following chapters, you will be praying that God would give your pastor power and wisdom and insight for ministry; that God would enable him to accurately interpret and

teach God's Word; that the Holy Spirit would guard his heart and mind from temptation; and, if he has a wife and children, that he would shepherd them with patience and love. If we care for our pastors, we will pray for them.

Praying for Your Pastor Benefits Your Brothers and Sisters in Christ

If your pastor is enabled and empowered by God to conduct a wise and loving ministry, your brothers and sisters in Christ will reap rich spiritual blessing. By faithfully praying for your pastor, then, you are fulfilling the biblical command to “serve one another” (Gal 5:13), because your prayers will be a means to strengthen your pastor which will in turn bless your fellow church members. Indeed, one of the greatest blessings a church can enjoy are godly leaders. Jonathan Edwards, a pastor from the mid-18th century, reminds us of the great treasure we have in holy, competent pastors.

Useful men are some of the greatest blessings of a people. To have many such is more for a people's happiness than almost anything, unless it be God's own gracious, spiritual presence amongst them; they are precious gifts of heaven.¹

If what Edwards' says is true—that useful men are second only to God's own spiritual presence—then we should pray continually that God would endue those men He has set among us with spiritual vigor, rich biblical insight, and skill to conduct their ministry. If we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we will pray for our pastors.

Praying for Your Pastor Benefits You

Sitting under the ministry of a pastor who preaches the whole counsel of God with courage and compassion, who counsels with skill and biblical insight, who leads the church with clarity and vision is perhaps the greatest good you can do for your soul in this life. Think of it for a moment. Don't you want to hear rich truth from God's Word each week? Don't you want the power of God's Word and God's Spirit to deliver you from your many temptations and sins? Don't you want a pastor who has the courage to tell you what you need to hear rather than what you want to hear (1 Tim. 4:3)? Don't you want a leader who will cast a vision for your church that is worthy to follow? The answer to each of these questions should be a resounding "Yes!" If you care for your soul, you will pray for your pastor.

So, does the Bible call us to pray for our

pastors? Yes, and as I noted above, we should count it a high privilege to do so. By praying for our pastors, we benefit them, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and ourselves. But how should we pray for our pastors? Answering this question will be the goal of the next three chapters.

2

PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR IN LIGHT OF HIS QUALIFICATIONS

In order to pray for your pastor in a way consistent with God's Word, our prayers should be shaped by what Scripture says about the qualifications, responsibilities, and unique pressures that attend the pastoral ministry. Only when we are properly *informed* about what the pastoral office entails will we adequately *pray* for our pastors. In this chapter we will examine specifically the pastor's qualifications. While it is true that all Christians should pursue the character qualities listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9, each of these virtues *must* be in the life of the pastor in some measure. We will survey these two passages in this

chapter, but first a word about the necessity of a qualified ministry.

The Importance of Qualified Pastors

I am grieved by the stories of pastors who have disqualified themselves from the ministry because of serious sin. I'm sure you share the same anguish when you hear of a pastor who has left his wife for another woman or who has been caught in some financial scandal that has brought disgrace upon Christ's name and forced a man to relinquish his post as God's servant-leader. Although the sin of well-known pastors will have wider impact than the sin of a lesser-known leader, pastoral failure is always tragic, regardless of the pastor's relative popularity. In every case, the effects of the pastor's sin will reach deep into the lives of God's people, upsetting the faith of many and even devastating the faith of some.

But I'm also grieved when I find men in pastoral ministry who, while not guilty of what we tend to classify as "gross sin" are nevertheless unqualified when it comes to the character credentials outlined in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. A controlling love for earthly comforts, unrestrained lust, an abusive temper, a tendency to quarrel with others, incompetency in preaching and teaching, strained relationships with neighbors,

selfish ambition, and a legalistic, overbearing home life are all grounds for disqualification from the pastoral ministry. Yet, each of these blemishes on the pastor's character is far more difficult to discern than the open rebellion of an adulterous relationship or obvious financial scandal. In order to be qualified as a shepherd and maintain a ministry that is, as Paul says, "above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2), a man must meet *all* of these requirements.

Exemplary, but Not Sinless

Yet, in giving these qualifications, the apostle Paul is not suggesting that a pastor is perfect and never sins. The reality is that pastors—like all other Christians—will wrestle with their own sin, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully. Even Paul, with his mature grasp of the gospel and after years of faithful service to Jesus Christ, groaned over his struggle with remaining sin (Rom 7:16-25). Sin did not gain an upper hand in Paul's life so as to disqualify him from ministry, but it was always there and it was always tenacious. The existence of indwelling sin and the necessity of remaining qualified is why Paul labored to discipline himself and his appetites (1 Cor 9:24-27).

The qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, therefore, do not imply that a pastor will

never battle with indwelling sin or never commit actual sins. Far from it! The word translated “above reproach” describes the general tenor of one’s life rather than the status of spiritual “arrival.” Indeed, a pastor who thinks he has “arrived” in terms of sanctification or pastoral competency is much closer to disaster (see 1 Cor 10:12), than one who recognizes his indwelling sin, yet, by God’s grace, seeks gradually to conform his life to God’s requirements for a ministry of church oversight. We could say it like this: the qualifications Paul outlines in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 highlight the *direction*, not the *perfection* of the pastor’s life.

But a pastor must be qualified and, in order to conduct an effective and enduring ministry, remain qualified. This is exactly where the importance of congregational prayer comes into sharp focus. While not downplaying the responsibility of the pastor to pursue his own holiness and to take the blame for his own sin, could it be that some pastors are failing because their people are not praying for them according to God’s Word?

We might pray for our pastor’s successful and growing ministry, but how many of us are praying regularly through Titus 1:5-9, pleading with God to uphold His servant in every area Paul mentions? Few of us, I suspect. And how many of us assume

that because our pastor is *currently* qualified, that he will *remain* qualified throughout his pastoral career? Yet, these kinds of attitudes and assumptions tend to dampen our fervor to pray for our pastor the way we should. It is only by God's grace that a pastor is qualified to enter the pastoral ministry, and it is only by God's grace that he will remain qualified. Biblically-informed prayer for the men who shepherd our church, then, is the need of the hour.

The Pastor's Qualifications

What are the pastor's qualifications? Fortunately, the Holy Spirit has given us a clear word on what character credentials a pastor must possess in order to assume the role of overseer. In straightforward, plain language, God, through the apostle Paul, provides all the instruction we need in the two passages of Scripture we've mentioned a few times in this chapter: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. For the sake of concision, we will examine both passages simultaneously by grouping the qualifications in the appropriate categories. And we will begin where Paul begins: with the man's desire for pastoral ministry.

Qualification #1: A Desire for the Ministry

In providing the list of qualifications for pastoral

ministry, Paul begins at a logical starting point. “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). A man must *want* to serve as an elder before he can actually carry out his role as elder. While there is such a thing as selfish ambition—when the power and prestige of the pastoral position appeal to a man more than the thought of serving Christ’s church in humble, self-sacrificial labor—there is also such a thing as noble ambition. When the Spirit qualifies a man for ministry, He instills in him a desire for leadership that is characterized by love for people and zeal for God’s glory. He’s not in the ministry for the sake of small or large-scale fame or in order to feel good about how many people need him. The qualified pastor desires to exercise his spiritual gifts of leadership and teaching, not for personal gain, but for the good of others.

Our prayers for our pastors, then, should include pleas to God that He would continually give to these men a desire for the ministry. As we will discover in later chapters, the pastoral ministry is fraught with many discouragements. Over time a pastor may sense his desire for the ministry decrease as he reels from various trials and disappointments. We must uphold him with prayer

so that God would maintain the flame of his passion for ministry.

But we should also pray that our pastor maintain God-honoring motivations as he conducts his ministry. Sadly, church history is littered with countless stories of men who began well and with every good intention but who eventually succumbed to pride and an overriding desire to get glory for themselves. We must pray that Christ, through His Spirit, will cultivate and sustain genuine humility during the course of the pastor's ministry.

Qualification #2: An Irreproachable Life

The second qualification that Paul lists in 1 Timothy 3 refers to the whole of the pastor's life: in all that he does he is to be "above reproach." What it means specifically to be above reproach is outlined in the rest of Paul's instructions for aspiring elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Although the pastor is not sinless, his character is free from sins that tend to bring disrepute upon the Christian ministry. The pastor who is above reproach is one who cannot be finally accused of marital infidelity, a habitual lack of self-control, love for money, a fiery temper, drunkenness, an out-of-control household, or pride. I say "finally accused" because it is possible for elders to be falsely accused of sin, which is why Paul instructs Timothy to only

take accusations against an elder seriously if they are based on more than one testimony (see 1 Timothy 5:19). When the dust of accusation settles, the pastor who is above reproach will be found innocent of the sins outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Praying that our pastors would maintain an irreproachable life means that we ask God specifically to uphold these men in every category outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. It also means pleading with God that our pastors would take care to watch over their personal lives, the place where integrity is either proven or lost. If a pastor is going to remain above reproach publically, he must be above reproach privately. Just as Paul tells Timothy and Titus, righteousness and holiness must characterize the pastor's life. Practically, this command refers to the pastor's recreation, his time on the Internet, what he watches on the television, the books he reads, the magazines he peruses, and the music he listens to. At basic, it means praying for our pastor's affections, that they would be "lovers of good" (Titus 1:8) and thus not inclined to give themselves to that which is evil.

Qualification #3: Sexual Fidelity

In order to qualify for an oversight ministry, a man must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2).

The original text in this passage actually says, “a one-woman man.” Paul’s phrase here can be applied not only to the married man but to the unmarried man as well. In other words, not only does Paul require that married men maintain strict fidelity to their wives, but single men are to demonstrate integrity in how they conduct themselves around other women. Those men who are not married yet aspire for pastoral ministry must not be characterized by flirtatious behavior, or by simultaneously leading multiple women to believe he is romantically interested. The single man is a one-woman man in the sense that he lives respectably toward all women in order to honor one woman, his future wife, if the Lord so blesses.

In light of Jesus’ warning against lust, we can also expand Paul’s instruction here to include the pastor’s eyes, mind, and heart (see Matt 5:27-30). It is not enough for a pastor to maintain a functional commitment with his wife for the sake of his ministry; he must guard himself from the spiritually eroding influences of lust (see 1 Pet 2:11). Cultivating fantasies about other women and exposing oneself to pornography will disqualify a man from ministry just as quickly as open adultery. By constantly feeding sexual lust by looking at pornographic images or skimpily dressed women,

the pastor, married or single, is demonstrating that he is no longer a one-woman man. He has a whole harem of women at his disposal, though they may be only mental or digital.

The specific content of our prayer under this heading should be obvious. Current statistics indicate, if true, that most pastors have struggled or currently struggle with pornography. Our prayers, therefore, should not only include requests to God that our pastors would pursue sexual purity and marital fidelity with all their might, but requests that those who are currently enmeshed in a slough of pornography and lust would confess their sins to those who oversee his ministry (e.g., other elders, certain designated members of the congregation) and exhibit a willingness to step down from his post until he has gained control over this sin. A pastor's growth in this area is vital not only to his spiritual health and vitality, but to the whole of his ministry. Pray diligently for your pastor's sexual fidelity.

Qualification #4: Self-Control

Related to the last qualification is Paul's requirement that the pastor exhibit self-control. The pastor is to be "sober-minded, self-controlled, [and] respectable" (1 Tim 3:2). While each of these words provide their own unique emphasis, all three carry the similar idea of self-control. The word translated

here as “sober-minded” (*nēphalios*) can also be rendered “temperate” and can denote self-control in one’s drinking of wine. In the context here, it refers to the pastor’s judgment. Alexander Strauch comments, “Negatively, it indicates the absence of any personal disorder that would distort a person’s judgment or conduct. Positively, it describes a person who is stable, circumspect, self-restrained, and clear-headed.”¹

The word rendered “self-control” is similar to *nēphalios* but describes one who is “sound-minded, discreet, and sensible, able to keep an objective perspective in the face of problems and disagreements.”² Such a character quality is essential for a pastor as he daily deals with people.

Finally, the pastor must be “respectable.” This word refers to the pastor’s behavior and highlights how a pastor conducts himself around others. A qualified shepherd is someone whom others can look up to and someone whom, as the idiom goes, “acts his age.” A respectable man is not entranced by the trappings and temptations of youth, nor is he lazy and unwilling to work hard and assume responsibility. In other words, he is disciplined (Titus 1:8). He manages his time well, does what is most important first, and is willing to set aside something good for something better.

The requirement for self-control, sober-judgment, and respectability also relates directly to Paul's requirement that an elder must not be a drunkard, quick-tempered, violent, or quarrelsome (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). Each of these qualifications obligates the pastor to gain control over his appetites and over his emotions.

The temptation to forsake self-control in each of the areas I just mentioned will be particularly acute for the pastor. If the trials of ministry become too much, a minister may look to alcohol or other substances (including food) in order to ease the pain. When confronted with difficult and divisive Christians, a minister may be tempted to handle such people with explosive, intimidating anger. And, because one of his primary responsibilities will be to teach the truth and correct false doctrine, a pastor may find himself prone to quarrelling with others who oppose biblical instruction.

A congregation that prays for their pastor, therefore, will pray that he continually grows in each of these virtues and in the broader quality of self-control. Without self-control, all else in a man's ministry will be lost. He will be, as the Proverbs tell us "like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov 25:28). A pastor must gain control over his physical appetites and over his mind. An elder

should take care with how he eats, how he thinks, how he conducts himself around others, and how he responds to difficult circumstances. He must grow in his ability to restrain and righteously focus his anger while avoiding the temptation to pick fights with others. And because self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23), our pastors need our consistent prayer that God would cultivate in them this vital quality. The development and progress of self-control in your pastor's life is not something that he can muster on his own: he needs the Spirit of God to work on his behalf, which means he needs you to pray on his behalf. Furthermore, the cultivation of these vital character qualities will help ensure that the pastor fulfills Paul's requirement that he be "well thought of by unbelievers" and kept from "fall[ing] into disgrace, into a snare of the devil" (1 Tim 3:7).

Qualification #5: An Orderly Home Life

Paul's logic for this qualification is inescapable. A pastor "must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church" (1 Tim 3:4-5). If a man is unable to oversee his family with dignity and order, why should one expect him to oversee the church with dignity and

order? A man's family is the testing ground to determine whether or not he has the requisite skills to cast a compelling vision, cultivate genuine obedience among the members, and lead the greater church to discipline unrepentant members. If a man cannot love his family—the people to whom he should have the most natural affection—how can he love God's people, most of whom he shares no ties of kinship? If he isn't sacrificing for the welfare of his family, why should we be confident he will put the needs of the congregation above his own desires? If he isn't diligent to teach spiritual truth to his family, why should we expect him to take his pulpit ministry seriously? If a pastor cannot cultivate wisdom and temperance among his children, how will he train his people in similar qualities (see Titus 1:6)?

A praying congregation will pray specifically and regularly for their pastor's home life, and they will pray that the pastor *make his family a priority*. Indeed, it is for the benefit of the congregation that he does so, for when he devotes himself to the spiritual good of his family, a church can know that they will receive the same kind of care. And, not only can such a church count on competent spiritual attention from a pastor who prioritizes his family, they can also count on care that *endures*. A

pastor whose family life is falling apart will soon be out of the ministry, and for good reason. But a pastor who, in the midst of his ministry, seeks the happiness and contentment of his family, will remain long in his role and prove to be a lasting benefit to the people under his care.

The pastor's home life should be a subject of much regular supplication among church members for another reason. As many adult children would attest, their life as a pastor's kid wasn't always easy, even with the best of pastor-dads. Added to all the other difficulties that attend childhood and young adulthood is the pressure, because of their dad's position, that young kids may feel to "perform" or demonstrate spiritual maturity among the members of the church. Our pastors, therefore, often sense a double pressure upon their home life. They must maintain the priority of their family, but they must also help their children navigate the often-unpredictable waters of life as a pastor's kid. This is no easy task, and many pastors are failing to the uttermost in this area. Because of their dad's tendency toward workaholicism or out of simple neglect, some kids are finding themselves without a shepherd, despite the fact they live with one.

It is clear that our commitment to pray for our pastor and his family is of vital importance. We

should pray that our pastors learn how to remain faithful to their post as shepherd of Christ's sheep while making their family a priority. We must also pray for our pastor's children, that they grow in a genuine relationship with Jesus and love for His church. Disaster here will mean disaster for the church. Pray for your pastor's home life.

Qualification #6: No Love of Money

Second only to the lure of sexual immorality is the enticement of wealth, so Paul tells Timothy and Titus that overseers must be free from the love of money (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). The desire to be wealthy can easily entangle Christians and bring them many temporal and spiritual troubles (1 Timothy 6:10; see also Mark 4:18-19). But Satan is particularly interested in ensnaring pastors with a love for money because he knows how it can dampen his spiritual affections, blunt his convictions, and tame his courage.

Once a pastor has indulged in and fed a love for money and possessions, he will soon find himself with a growing temptation to flatter his people in order to keep them around and stacking the collection plate each week. He will be drawn into twisting the Scripture in order to remove offense from his teaching and fill the pews. Compromises will be made to keep big givers in the

church and his courage to confront sin will vanish. Rich biblical insight will give way to platitudes, and a disciplined life of study, prayer, and discipleship will be replaced with more and more hobbies. Like the third soil in Jesus' parable, the pastor who loves money will become unfruitful to his eternal destruction. And his people will follow (see Matt 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14).

The answer to the temptation of a love for money, however, is *not* to keep a pastor poor, as some churches have mistakenly done. I know of men who have applied to churches where the full-time compensation package didn't even meet the median income for a given area. But relative wealth or poverty has nothing to do with the desires of the heart: a poor pastor can desire more money just as easily as a well-paid pastor can. What matters is that the pastor is an example of how to set one's affections on heavenly riches rather than earthly treasures (see Matt 6:19-21). He is to be generous, sensible in his spending, and *never* willing to compromise the truth for the sake of money.

Our prayers, then, should be for our pastor's *heart*. Our pastors need the Spirit to give them continually such a sight of eternity and spiritual realities that they are not worried about having enough money, distracted by thoughts of acquiring

more money, nor moved (by wealthy congregants) by the promise of large amounts of money. We should pray that our pastors have a heart full of trust in the Lord so that they are able to give generously, spend wisely, and avoid any hint of compromise.

A congregation can also pray that the church will be able to continue to adequately provide for their pastor. While it is true that one's relative wealth or poverty can't ultimately eradicate greed or change the desires of one's heart, deliberate prayer to God can keep our pastors balanced between extremes of great wealth and dire poverty. In Proverbs, Agur asks that God would give him "neither poverty nor riches" but to "feed me with the food that is needful for me." There are twin motivations for this prayer. Agur desires to avoid great wealth "lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?'" and he wants to avoid serious poverty so that he is not tempted to steal and "profane the name of my God" (Prov 30:8-9). A pastor for whom a congregation adequately provides will be able to focus his whole heart and energy on serving the flock.

In Titus 1:7-8, Paul connects the qualification of no love for money with the pastor's practice of hospitality. A pastor must not be "greedy for gain,"

but “hospitable.” Why this contrast? Because Paul knows that a pastor whose heart is wrapped up in acquiring more money and possessions will probably be less willing to practice hospitality to others. His greed will dampen his desire to share with others and open his home to those in need or whom he might not know. Prayer for our pastor’s heart and adequate provision, then, will enable him to fulfill other qualifications, namely the requirement to practice hospitality.

Qualification #7: Humility

It is no wonder that Paul would include humility in his list of qualifications for pastors (Titus 1:7). Spirit-wrought humility is a virtue apart from which no other grace can flourish. Paul knew well the truth conveyed by his apostolic colleague: “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). If a pastor nurtures a life of pride and arrogance, he will be forming a ministry to which God is directly opposed. A frightening prospect, to be sure, yet how many pastors are feeding attitudes of self-importance and giving themselves to self-promotion; using the gospel to highlight their ministry rather than using their ministry to highlight the gospel? How many pastors, thinking too highly of their own spirituality, resist accountability and friendship with other godly men?

And how many pastors have been finally dismissed from the helm of leadership because of unchecked pride?

Sadly, too many stories of failed pastors illustrate the devastating effects of pride. Arrogant condescension toward church members, a penchant for making unilateral decisions, an unhealthy longing to promote one's ministry, and a sense of entitlement are the sure signs that pride has taken the upper-hand in a man's life, and his ministry and spiritual life will eventually unravel. It is for this very reason that Paul does not allow a new believer to be installed as a pastor (1 Tim 3:7). A man who is young in the faith does not yet have the spiritual maturity to discern or fend off Satan's strategies to enflame his pride. But if a pastor labors to cultivate genuine humility before God and others, he will receive ministry-empowering grace from God and establish a strong foundation for a lifetime of service to Christ.

It should be obvious, then, that a congregation that prays for their pastor will pray diligently for his humility. But we need to know specifically how to pray. God-given humility won't be a kind of pseudo-meekness where the pastor is constantly indulging in self-effacing talk or downplaying his gifts. No, true spiritual humility is often far less

overt than the counterfeit. In fact, you may find that a pastor who is really humble won't talk much about himself at all. He will also be willing to take the advice of others (Prov 12:15) and forgo personal fame for the sake of ministry (like Jesus, see John 7:1-10). He will be gentle with his people (2 Tim 2:24-25), open to accountability, rebuke, and correction (Prov 17:10), and, unlike the Pharisees, not too concerned about receiving the honors and accolades that come with his position (Matt 23:6). As one author wisely notes, "Shepherd leadership requires humility before God and responsiveness to God's people. It resists pretense, posturing, and privilege."³

Yet ultimately, a humble pastor will seek to conduct ministry according to God's Word. Scripture tells us that true humility begins, not with how we treat people, but how we treat the Scripture (see Isa 66:2). Those who speak from themselves—that is, on their own authority and not from the Bible—are clearly seeking their own glory (John 7:18). A humble pastor will be, therefore, constantly evaluating his work to make sure that he is overseeing a ministry that is driven primarily by Scripture, not his own ideas.

There are twin incentives for praying for your pastor's humility. First, humility will produce

the blessed character qualities mentioned above. But secondly, by praying for your pastor's humility, you will do much to set him on a straight course in all the other qualifications. A humble pastor will be less likely to trust himself and more ready to take instruction and receive accountability, which will enable him to grow in the other character credentials Paul outlines for Timothy and Titus. "If this disease [of pride] is healed," observes Edwards, "other things are easily rectified."⁴

Qualification #8: Able To Teach

Finally, a pastor must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). This requirement does not merely refer to a man's gifts as an engaging communicator. Possessing such skills might be helpful, but Paul's primary concern here is that a man be able to accurately and compellingly teach true doctrine (1 Tim 1:3; 4:11; 6:2; Titus 2:1). A pastor who is "able to teach" must be able to instruct the congregation in the truth of Scripture while also correcting—gently at times, yet always decisively—those who oppose sound teaching (2 Tim 2:25; Titus 1:9-11). A pastor's teaching ministry will be both a pulpit ministry (2 Tim 4:2) and a discipleship ministry (2 Tim 2:2), and in each of these areas, a competent, qualified pastor will be able to rightly apply the truth of the gospel to the lives of his

people and those who attend the church but are not yet Christians (see 2 Tim 4:5).

The ability to teach is a non-negotiable. It is not enough for a man to be pious, hard working, and tender-hearted toward others. Personal godliness is necessary but not sufficient to qualify a man for pastoral ministry. Nor is it enough to possess the ability to instruct a congregation in personal morality. As pastor John Newton (1725-1807) once noted in a letter to a friend, “A minister may be diligent in his work, regular in his family, resident with his people and attentive to them, and in many respects exemplary in his outward conduct, and yet not preach *Jesus Christ and him crucified*.”⁵ In other words, it is possible that a man may fulfill every other qualification in Paul’s lists to Timothy and Titus and yet not preach the gospel in a way that edifies saints and convicts and saves sinners. Until this problem is remedied, a man remains unqualified for pastoral ministry.

Nevertheless, while it is essential that a pastor possess the ability to teach, it is also possible *and* desirable that he grow in this ability to teach. Our prayers should therefore consist of humble petitions to God that he would continually equip our pastors with greater biblical insight, exegetical skill, verbal proficiency, and spiritual power.

Notice, however, that I did not suggest that you should pray that your pastor become like some other famous pastor or that he should adopt another pastor's preaching style. Certainly there are things pastors can learn from another's ministry, but it is unfair and unwise for members of a congregation to expect that their pastor would become like another pastor in terms of personal style. Rather, we should desire that our shepherd grow in his ability to understand and communicate the biblical text in the context of his own style and personality.

There are also practical items we can pray for under this heading. Perhaps the most important is that God would provide adequate time for study and preparation. Over the years I have noticed that relatively few Christians fully comprehend the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional toll that biblical study and sermon preparation take on the preacher. Some scoff at the idea that a pastor should take much over 5 hours to prepare a sermon. And lazy pastors who throw their messages together in under 90 minutes or hypocritical pastors who neglect to apply the truth to their own hearts may not suffer too much in this area. But those pastors who desire to be certain of what Scripture teaches, to apply it to their own hearts through meditation and prayer,

and teach it effectively will always feel like they need more time for study.

So, pray earnestly that God would grant your pastors the time they need for reading, study and preparation. It will be to your great benefit if your pastor has sufficient time to study: he will grow as a preacher, and his messages will be a source of blessing to you and your brothers and sisters in the congregation.

Staying Qualified

Your pastor needed God's empowering grace to be found qualified for pastoral ministry, and he needs that same grace to remain qualified for ministry. It is easy to forget the latter half of this truth. We might think that once it is established that a man is qualified for the work of gospel ministry, his character is locked in place and he is no longer in need of God's sustaining mercy. Yet, this is no small mistake. If we continue in this wrong thinking, we will rarely feel the need to pray for our shepherd's daily need for Christ and the fruit that only He can provide, including the fruit of pastoral qualification (see John 15:5). But if we recognize that our pastors need God to maintain their status as qualified overseers, we will more readily align prayers to God according to Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Now that we have examined the pastor's qualifications, we turn in the next chapter to consider how the knowledge of our pastor's roles and responsibilities should guide our prayers on their behalf.

3

PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR IN LIGHT OF HIS RESPONSIBILITIES

In the last chapter we learned how to pray for our pastor according to his qualifications. Because Scripture outlines the kind of character and skill an overseer must possess, I argued that we should pray for our pastor according to these biblical qualifications so that he might *remain qualified* for the vital work of shepherding God's flock.

In this chapter I will consider what Scripture teaches concerning the pastor's roles and responsibilities so that we can pray in a way that aligns with God's will. If we are mistaken about the kind of work to which Scripture calls pastors, our

prayers may be counter-productive to what God is attempting to accomplish through their ministry.

The Pastor as Shepherd-Leader

Among the many words and phrases used to describe the pastoral role, I believe the term shepherd-leader is probably the most descriptive and comprehensive. A shepherd is one who is responsible to feed, protect, and lead sheep. In the Old Testament, God used shepherding imagery to describe how His prophets and priests were to care for his people. God even called King David a “shepherd.” “And the LORD said [to David], ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel’” (2 Sam 5:2). Although God was the Chief Shepherd to his people in the Old Testament (Psalm 23:1), He delegated pastoral responsibilities to under-shepherds who would feed, protect, and lead His sheep according to His Word. Sadly, the history of Israel is largely a narrative of failed leadership and pastoral neglect. God’s people were scattered and ensnared in sin because, despite the presence of so-called leaders, there were no *true* shepherds in Israel (Ezek 34:5). Rather than serving the people, these false-shepherds were serving themselves (Ezek 34:12).

Despite the dearth of competent pastoral leadership in the Old Testament, God promised to

send His people a Shepherd (singular) who would draw them back together and guide them in genuine obedience (Ezek 32:24) and shepherds (plural) after God's own heart, ready to feed His people with "knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15). In time, the Good Shepherd came to His people (John 10:14). Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ rescued His sheep from the clutches of their mortal enemies—Satan, sin, and death—and brought them into the safe pastures of salvation. But just like God worked in the Old Testament with Israel, so Christ works in the New Testament with His church. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), but He has delegated pastoral responsibilities to under-shepherds who are tasked by Christ to feed, protect, and lead His sheep according to His Word (1 Peter 5:1-4; John 21:15-19).

The term shepherd-leader best describes the pastoral role because it provides a comprehensive heading under which every pastoral responsibility can be understood. A pastor is a shepherd-leader because he is called by Christ to feed, protect, and guide His sheep. We will now examine in detail what each of these responsibilities entail.

Feeding the Sheep

Sheep, like any living creature, need sustenance to

maintain physical health. Although Christians have been born-again and have the Holy Spirit residing in them, they need food to maintain their spiritual health. The pastor is tasked with providing Christ's sheep with healthy, accessible nourishment so that they might maintain their spiritual health and continue growing into maturity (Col 1:28-29; see also John 20:15-19).

But how do pastors feed Christ's sheep? Perhaps a better, more foundational question is: With what do pastors feed Christ's sheep? There is only one answer. God's people are fed and strengthened with God's Word. There is no other food by which a Christian can grow spiritually than the pure milk of Scripture (1 Pet 2:1-2). The answer to our first question—How do pastors feed Christ's sheep?—now comes into sharper relief. If God's Word is the only source of spiritual nourishment for God's people, then the primary way by which this food will be delivered is through teaching and preaching.

It should come as no surprise, then, that much of Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus on their role as pastor would include exhortations to teach and preach (1 Tim 4:6; 11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:14; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 15; 3:1). Timothy and Titus were called to teach biblical doctrine, to constantly

remind their people of Christ's work on the cross, to give the church practical instruction on Christian living, and to warn believers of false teaching. So important was this aspect of pastoral work that Paul tells Timothy that his preaching ministry needed constant attention and could not be set aside for any reason (2 Tim 4:2). Why? Because the health and vitality of his local church depended upon such ministry. It is no coincidence that Paul required elders to be able to teach sound doctrine; the word "sound" means "healthy" or "wholesome." The nutrition imagery here is deliberate, and both Timothy and Titus were required to only lay before Christ's sheep that which would produce spiritual health.

The pastor's teaching ministry, however, does not end with his pulpit or classroom ministry. The call to feed Christ's sheep through teaching includes not only formal teaching and preaching, but personal discipleship as well (Matt 28:18-20). The pastor teaches in the pulpit, and he teaches in the counseling session. The pastor teaches in the classroom, and he also teaches as he trains other leaders and servants. His teaching ministry will also extend into the area of music, for a church's praise ministry will be one of the vital ways Christ's sheep are taught and fed. Paul says that through Psalms

and hymns and spiritual songs, we teach one another (Col 3:16). As one book puts it, “Everything teaches.”

Teaching is everything. I do not mean teaching is the only thing that a pastor should do. Nor do I advocate some lifeless orthodoxy. What I mean is that everything that happens up front in a corporate worship gathering is part of the teaching ministry of the church. Everything teaches, whether you intend it to or not.¹

Pastors are responsible, then, to feed Christ’s sheep through teaching, and this teaching will come by way of formal preaching, counseling, discipleship, and the music ministry of the local congregation. This feeding through teaching and preaching will also result in a well-equipped, spiritually mature congregation that is able to competently serve one another and weather the storms of personal trial (Eph 4:12-16).

As we receive this good food from our pastors, we should pray regularly that God would continue to sustain and bless their teaching ministry. We can pray that God would grant them exegetical and theological insight into the Scripture, that they would have wisdom for counseling men and

women through their challenges and troubles, and that he would, like Ezra, first apply the truth of the Scripture to his own heart and life *before* he teaches it to others (Ezra 7:10). A weak, ill-fed shepherd will eventually crumble under the weight of pastoral responsibility, so we must pray that God grant him the grace to feed himself even as he feeds others. And, as I've already noted in chapter 1, this need for our pastor to feed himself on biblical truth as he prepares for teaching, preaching, and counseling will require time. We will serve our pastor immeasurably if we ask God to give him adequate *time* for preparation.

As our pastor faithfully discharges his responsibility to feed his sheep, his labors may result in an abundance of spiritual sustenance that can be shared with others. What I refer to here is a pastor's ministry to the broader community. While a pastor's primary focus must be to shepherd the flock that God has assigned him in the local congregation (1 Pet 5:2), it is possible that his labors here can benefit others who are not part of his local church. Our desires for the spiritual growth and health of Christ's people should not terminate with our local congregation; we should long for all true churches to flourish and for countless people to be

drawn to Christ through faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel.

Practically, this means that we can pray that the Lord would bless our pastor's ministry in a way that serves others outside our church building, perhaps through radio, conferences, articles, books, or seminary teaching opportunities. A pastor who loves his people, recognizes the weight of his charge from God, feels acutely how much time is required to fulfill his responsibilities, and shuns self-promotion will not likely look to create for himself opportunities outside his local congregation. Rather, it will be the role of others to pray for this aspect of a pastor's ministry and encourage him in these endeavors.

Protecting the Sheep

Corresponding to their responsibility to feed God's flock through the teaching of God's Word is the pastor's task of protecting God's people from false teaching and false teachers. Multiple times throughout the pastoral epistles Paul's command to teach the church is coupled with a charge to protect the church by correcting and rebuking false teachers. For example, in his letter to Titus, Paul includes competence in correcting unbiblical teaching among the list of an elder's spiritual credentials. "[The overseer] must hold firm to the

trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9; also 1:13).

When Paul left Timothy at the church in Ephesus, he wanted him to remain in that city and “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (1 Tim 1:3). The apostle follows this instruction with a concise summary of pastoral ministry: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5). Spiritual health and happiness is helped, not hindered, by pastors who are careful to guard their people from false teaching and false teachers. Why? Because unbiblical ideas about doctrine, once accepted and believed, will wreak havoc on a Christian’s spiritual life (1 Tim 1:6; 19-20; Gal 3:1-6). A pastor who genuinely cares for his flock will not only teach and preach, he will warn and correct and rebuke (see also 1 Tim 4:1-5; 6:2-5; 2 Tim 2:24-25; cf. Acts 20:28-31).

Protecting Christ’s sheep also requires that a pastor lead his people in church discipline. Church discipline is designed by Christ to protect His sheep by guarding the local gathering from unrepentant sin. When sin is left to grow in the life of a professing Christian, its influence is like leaven—it

gets into everything, and quickly (1 Cor 5:6). Soon, many members of a congregation can be infected by the immoral influence of a sinning brother or sister. When pastors are faithful to teach and lead their people in church discipline, they will do much to protect their people from sin and encourage their sanctification.

Church discipline is also designed to protect the sinning Christian. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:5-11 that discipline starts on an individual level as Christians, with love and biblical precision, rebuke and admonish each other for personal sin (Matt 18:15). This first level of discipline is part of our everyday Christian life, and serves to guard our brothers and sisters from the heart-hardening effects of sin (Heb 3:12-15).

But if a professing Christian continues to be unrepentant despite the faithful exhortations of their brother or sister, step two in the discipline process requires an increase in accountability. Jesus says that if they do not listen to the initial confrontation, “take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (Matt 18:16). If this step does not compel the sinning Christian to repent and turn back to Christ, the next step is to “tell it the church” (Matt 18:17) which would start

with informing the local leaders of the congregation of the situation. If the professing Christian refuses to listen to the church, the church leaders are responsible for leading their people in the appropriate response: “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt 18:17). That is, the church is to assume that this unrepentant person is someone in need of evangelism with the hope that they might turn from their sin and be restored.

Such a response protects the sinner because it helps him see clearly the seriousness of his spiritual condition. Pastors who refuse to lead their people in church discipline by teaching and facilitation are not only hurting their people, they are harming the sinner who will never have the chance to see his precarious spiritual situation for what it really is and repent from his sin.

There are times, however, when pastors of a given congregation are called to bypass a multi-step process of church discipline. For example, if a professing Christian commits a sin of a particularly scandalous and public nature, immediate public denunciation and rebuke is required (see 1 Cor 5:1-12). If a divisive person continues to rend the unity of a congregation, the leadership is required to

remove that person from membership after a second warning (Titus 3:9-11).

In order for a pastor to lead his people in church discipline, it should be clear from the above discussion that he needs *courage*. It is painful to deal with sin; it is simply much easier to teach on the more pleasant aspects of the Christian life and ignore sinful members than it is to bring the entire process of discipline to its required end. Well, it's easier in the short term. Inevitably, pastors who neglect the unmistakably clear teaching of Scripture on this issue will only hurt their people and undermine their ministry. Most of the time, the underlying cause of pastoral neglect in this area is a lack of courage. If you desire your church to remain healthy and holy, pray for your pastor's courage.

Leading the Sheep

A pastor is also charged with leading Christ's sheep. Much of the pastor's leadership will come through his preaching and teaching as he guides Christ's people with Christ's Word. But there are other specific areas in which the pastor must exercise leadership. He is, for example, called to set an example of godliness for the flock (1 Tim 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 3:10). Paul does not give pastoral qualifications to Timothy and Titus in order to exempt members of a congregation from pursuing

such character qualities. Rather, God's design for enabling his people to grow in Christlikeness is to put living examples before them, and a pastor, even imperfectly, is intended to serve as this example.

Accordingly, Paul regularly exhorted other Christians to follow his teaching *and* his example (1 Cor 11:1; 2 Thess 3:7, 9; 2 Tim 1:13). The author of Hebrews exhorts us to "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7). Good teaching is a powerful means of grace, and when it is attended by holiness in the life of the teacher, the practical effects are deep and enduring. Indeed, one of the means that God uses to enable people to see the glory of the gospel are men who have made themselves servants of the church for Christ's sake (see 2 Cor 4:5). It is no wonder why Paul told Timothy that his people's perseverance in the faith depended in significant measure upon Timothy paying close attention to his teaching and personal life (1 Tim 4:16).

As the pastor teaches and strives, by God's grace (and the prayers of his people!), to live according to the truth he proclaims and counsels, he will also make it a priority to find other faithful brothers to whom he can entrust doctrine and leadership (2 Tim 2:2; see also 1 Tim 6:13, 20; 2

Tim 1:14). He will need fellow elders, faithful lay leaders, and devoted servants working in the formal capacity of deacon (1 Tim 3:8-12) and in informal capacities as well. Actually, one of the greatest blessings a pastor can enjoy is the gift of quality leaders and servants with whom he can share oversight and to whom he can entrust various practical responsibilities.

We see the importance of this division of labor in the early chapters of Acts. As the church was growing and the apostles were teaching and preaching, it soon became apparent that the practical needs in the church required specific attention. It would not be effective or beneficial for the long-term health of the church, however, for the apostles, tasked with preaching the gospel and defending the faith, to split their attention between preaching and handling the details of fulfilling these material needs. Luke records how the apostles remedied this situation.

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should

give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).

In order to maintain an effective preaching ministry and make sure that their sisters in Christ had adequate material provision, the apostles delegated this table ministry to qualified, competent, Spirit-filled servants. Positive results were felt immediately: "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." (Act 6:7).

So it is today. The ministry of your local church will thrive if your pastors are able to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer

and freely delegate other tasks to qualified servants. Faithfully asking God to raise up servants within your church will be one of the greatest blessings you can offer your pastor.

But it should also be clear that one of your pastor's greatest needs in this area of leadership training and delegation is *wisdom*. Your pastor needs biblically-grounded, far-sighted, God-given wisdom in order to select qualified leaders and servants. While it is difficult to labor without help, it is even worse to labor with the wrong kind of help. Pray that God would give your pastor wisdom in choosing the right kind of people for the right roles.

We now turn to chapter 4 and the pastor's unique pressures and temptations.

4

**PRAY FOR YOUR PASTOR
IN LIGHT OF HIS
PRESSURES &
TEMPTATIONS**

Since my conversion approximately seventeen years ago, I have had the opportunity to serve in many different ministry contexts. As a church member, I have led worship for children's church, taught Sunday School to adults of all ages, served on the leadership team for men's ministry, young adult ministry, and singles ministries. I have cared for little kiddos in the nursery, played drums for the music team, and helped the youth pastor disciple young students (while also receiving some valuable discipleship myself). While each of these areas of

service elicited a certain amount of pressure and, at times, anxiety, none of them have compared to my experience in vocational, pastoral ministry.

Every vocational calling has its own set of pressures and temptations, and pastoral ministry is no exception. Indeed, because pastors are public Christian leaders who are tasked with guiding God's people through an accurate and faithful handling of God's Word, Satan has a special interest in attacking and undoing them. If your goal is to scatter and confuse the sheep, strike the shepherd (Zech 13:7). So, while I do not want to take away from the trouble that often befalls faithful Christians in all lines of work, my goal in this chapter is to highlight the unique trials that attend pastoral ministry in light of a pastor's special vulnerability to Satan and his evil strategies. A congregation faithful to fight for their pastor through prayer will do much to protect him from temptation and comfort his soul in the midst of trial.

Anxiety Over the Flock

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul had to engage in a little self-defense. He didn't want to do it, but some members of the church Corinth had started to believe what the false teachers were saying about Paul—that he was

unqualified as a pastor, unskilled in teaching, and motivated by greed and lust for power. In order to maintain the integrity of his ministry and the gospel, Paul had to establish his apostolic credentials. These credentials, however, were not what we might think of today. In order to convince those few fickle Corinthian Christians that he was a trustworthy minister of the gospel, Paul pointed them to his suffering (2 Cor 11:23-27). Because of his unwavering devotion to Christ and his countless labors on behalf of the gospel, Paul had endured massive amounts of physical injury, deprivation, persecution, and danger. He had been stoned, whipped, and beaten with rods. He had been shipped-wrecked multiple times and experienced hunger and thirst on more than one occasion.

Yet, these physical trials did not overshadow another area of suffering Paul endured. Because he loved Christ's people with the very affection of Christ (Phil 1:8), Paul's heart was knit to the Christians throughout the various churches in such a profound way that their pain became his pain, and their spiritual welfare was utmost in his daily thoughts. "And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches" the apostle confesses. "Who is weak, and

I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant” (2 Cor 11:28-29)?

Similarly, a pastor who genuinely loves his people will attest to the reality of this kind of anxiety and pressure. When his sheep are caught in the jaws of a wolf or in the snare of their own sin or found wandering off into a dangerous wilderness, the good under-shepherd cannot act fast enough. And after he rescues the injured and wandering sheep, he fears for their future safety. When he is tending to the healthy and happy sheep, he is wondering about the others while keeping a keen eye on the nearby countryside for potential enemies. He is always on guard; always concerned; always watching; always praying.

As we pray for our pastors, we should not pray that God remove this pressure and anxiety. That may sound unkind, but it isn't. To ask that God remove these emotional trials would be to ask God to stop a pastor from loving his people. With true love comes great cost, and pastors bear the burden of watching over sheep for whom they feel deeply.

But we can pray that our pastor would be anxious over the right things. We should pray that the Lord would enable our pastors to trust wholly in the Holy Spirit for the spiritual growth of the congregation and for the salvation of once-

professing Christians who have defected (1 Cor 3:6-7; 2 Tim 2:25-26). The burden to produce spiritual fruit and repentance in the hearts of people was never the pastor's to bear. One of the paradoxes of the ministry is that a pastor can be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (2 Cor 6:10); he can be anxious, yet remain at peace (2 Cor 11: 28-29; cf. Phil 4:6-9). We do our pastors much good when we pray that their affections for Christ's sheep would be strong and their trust in God would be steady and deep.

Attacks from Professing Christians

Pastors, perhaps more than anyone, must endure attacks from professing Christians—even those with whom they may have walked and served over several years. Although personal and physical attacks from those outside the faith are painful, the grief caused by those who profess Christ and then turn their back on the church and aim their discontent at the pastor can be, at times, nearly unbearable. One can almost hear the anguish in David's voice when he laments, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Ps 41:9). Sadly, pastors, if they have been in the ministry for any time at all, can attest to David's agony, for it is not uncommon for those who have been the pastor's biggest fans to become his most vigorous opponents.

What I am referring to here is not the well-timed and thoughtful rebukes of godly church members. A pastor who desires to grow in wisdom will welcome such correction and instruction from his people (see Prov 12:15; 13:10; 19:20). What I am talking about here are those unwarranted, unprovoked, and unkind confrontations from those who profess to know Jesus Christ yet appear to find delight in verbal sparring and conflict.

While it is true that an overbearing pastor may reap the fruit of his own tendency to quarrel (see Prov 15:1), it is equally true that pastors who desire to guide the members of Christ's church into lives of deepening repentance and faith will occasionally encounter opposition from immature Christians, and such a ministry will eventually expose the spurious faith of false Christians. When false religion is exposed, it can react in hostile, even violent ways (as was the case with the Pharisees; see Luke 6:11) and the courageous pastor who holds professing Christians to the standard of God's Word will bear the brunt of such opposition.

Our regular supplication for our pastors, then, should consist of prayers for *endurance*. Nothing tends to take the wind out of pastor's sails more than harsh opposition from professing Christians, so a pastor needs supernatural strength and stability.

Pressure on Family and Home Life

One pressure that pastors sense that tends to be unique among Christians is the pressure he feels upon his home and family life. I'm not talking merely about the time factor. Most Christian families are busy, and there are plenty of dads who find it difficult, due to travel or work responsibilities, to spend adequate time with their families. Rather, I am referring to the pressure that comes from the cumulative weight of time deprivation *and* the struggle to maintain within their family a steady and growing love for Christ and his church.

That latter statement might almost sound counter-intuitive. Wouldn't a pastor's home be the *best* environment in which to nurture true spirituality among the family members? While there are certainly advantages of living in a pastor's family, there are also some unique challenges that come along with this arrangement, especially when it comes to developing one's relationship with Christ and members of one's local congregation.

First, there can be an unspoken expectation from the church that a pastor's children will behave and act in an unusually mature way, even as young kids. While it is true that a pastor must maintain an orderly home life and demonstrate an ability to

manage his children well (1 Tim 3:4; Titus 1:6), it is not the case that the pastor's children will be sinless or exempt from the immaturity of youth. Yet, when children begin to sense within the congregation a kind of double standard—one for the pastor's kids and one for all the other kids—they will be tempted toward hypocrisy, rebellion, and bitterness. Add to this the fact that daddy's absence is often due to his work at church and pastor's kids can find themselves with a growing disdain for Jesus and His people.

Second, there are also unique troubles that come along with being a pastor's wife. A similar double standard may exist for pastor's wives, as well as unrealistic expectations for the wife of an overseer to fulfill (often unpaid) ministerial roles and responsibilities in the church. A pastor's wife may discover that it is difficult, upon first moving into a new church, to find and maintain intimate friendships with other women in light of her connection with the one who oversees the church. Because of this lack of relationship, a pastor's wife may feel isolated and alone during the initial stages of her husband's ministry. But as these early trials pass and she settles into church life and routine, a pastor's wife will not find that she has now come to place where she is beyond suffering. One of the

greatest burdens a pastor's wife will bear will be for her husband when he is maligned and attacked by other members or regular attenders of the church. While a wise pastor will shield his wife from most of these troubles, there will be some trials about which his wife will become aware. Sometimes, even those who were good friends with the pastor's wife will participate in or align themselves with those who are attacking her husband. When this kind of situation occurs, the grief that wives feel can be almost insurmountable.

Temptations to Sin and Compromise

Finally, we must remember that our pastors are open to powerful temptations to sin and compromise. As I noted already in this chapter, Satan has a special interest in derailing pastors. He will attempt to draw pastors into sin by intensifying their trials, using false and immature believers to wound and discourage them, and by inducing disillusionment about gospel ministry. But Satan will also work on a pastor's weakness and sinful proclivities. Our great accuser has tailor-made temptations for every pastor, and he knows exactly how to create offers they can't refuse. For some pastors, it will be inclinations toward pastoral fame, for others it will be an unhealthy desire for authority. Many pastors will find their heart enticed

by sexual sin, while others will be intrigued by money and possessions.

The glory-loving pastor will be tempted to craft messages that are palatable to a larger audience or pursue ministry opportunities that take him away from his primary responsibility to shepherd his local church and care for his family. The power-hunting pastor will be tempted to abuse his position or demand inappropriate respect from others (see Matt 23:6-7). Satan will entice the lustful pastor with online pornography or inappropriate relationships with other women. The money-hungry pastor will be tempted to back away from confronting sin for fear of losing big givers; he may also find his heart for Christ slowly choked out by the desire for a comfortable life (see Mark 4:19).

Satan has millennia of experience overturning the lives and ministries of pastors, and he will stop at nothing to further his ongoing agenda of striking shepherds. Our knowledge of the pastor's role, the reality of his temptations and pressures, and the fact that our enemy is constantly seeking those whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), should compel us to serious diligence in praying for our pastors. We should ask that God would cultivate in our pastors unwavering integrity and a passion for holiness. We should pray that the Spirit would constantly satisfy

our pastor's heart in the love of God (Ps 90:14) so that he might never be led away by other women, money, or fame. In all of this, we should pray that God would give our pastor wisdom in order to discern all of Satan's schemes (2 Cor 2:11).

But we should also pray that our pastor would know his own heart and be aware of his particular temptations. While all of us wrestle with indwelling sin, we also recognize that we are more susceptible to certain temptations than others. This tendency toward specific kinds of sin is due to many factors: our background, our personality, our strengths, our weaknesses, and our place in life. We each need wisdom to discern where we are the weakest so that we might take special precaution in those areas, while not neglecting the others. Your pastor is no different, so pray for him.

Now that we have examined the pastor's qualifications, roles, and unique temptations, I want us to consider briefly the kind of fruit that a praying congregation can expect from consistent, biblically informed prayers for their pastors.

5

THE FRUIT OF A PRAYING CONGREGATION

We have spent the past few chapters discussing the necessity of praying for our pastors. By outlining the various qualifications for and responsibilities of pastoral ministry, I hope you have gained some fresh insight on what such a ministry entails and new motivation to intercede for those who intercede for you. But a vital question remains: What will be the fruit of a congregation who consistently prays for their pastor according to biblical priorities? What might a congregation expect if they devote themselves to praying for those who are charged with caring for their souls? I will suggest seven areas of blessing that a church might expect from regular, intentional, biblically informed prayer for their pastors.

A Competent Pastoral Ministry

The first and most obvious blessing will be your pastor's progress in the ministry. Paul instructs Timothy to immerse himself in his tasks of preaching, teaching, and godly conduct so that the congregation would be able to see the young pastor's growth in ministerial competence (1 Tim 4:15). A congregation who prays for their pastor according to the biblical categories we outlined in previous chapters will be aligning themselves with God's very purposes in the life of the pastor. God desires the shepherd to make observable progress in his ability to care for Christ's flock, and your prayers will serve as one of the vital means by which this growth occurs.

Consider this: What could be better for your church than a group of overseers who are above reproach in their personal and public lives, who have no love for money, who are hospitable, generous, honest, and self-controlled; who are able, by God's grace, to resist the temptation to commit disqualifying sin and compromise the ministry; who love their families and their people; who are powerful, edifying, skillful teachers of God's Word; and who are courageous to do what is best for Christ's sheep? While our prayers do not guarantee such blessings or exempt a pastor from personal

responsibility to exert himself in pursuing Christlikeness, a church that is praying diligently for their pastor has much better grounds on which to expect these blessings than a church that neglects their responsibility to pray for their pastor.

A Spiritually Healthy Church

Pastors who model spiritual maturity, who preach, teach, and counsel well, who conduct their ministry according to the mandates in Scripture, and who are committed to the well-being of Christ's sheep will be a means of much spiritual growth among God's people. As I noted in the first chapter, your commitment to praying for your pastor will serve to benefit not only your pastor but all those under his care, including you! A church led by competent pastors will, over time, exhibit spiritual discernment, love for one another, active ministry among the saints and community, passion for the glory of God, a commitment to spread the gospel near and far, and humble obedience to Scripture.

The Salvation of Sinners and the Perseverance of the Saints

Paul connects the salvation of sinners, not exclusively, but nonetheless directly to a competent pastoral ministry. First, he instructs Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Paul's

command here meant that among all his responsibilities, Timothy was to see himself as a soul-winner. Through his preaching, he was laboring to edify and strengthen Christ's church so that her members would possess the skills necessary to conduct useful gospel ministry to people both inside and outside the church (Eph 4:12-16; Gal 6:10). But Timothy also needed to view himself as one who was calling unbelievers to salvation through the gospel. There would be unbelievers visiting the church who needed to hear a clear, compelling presentation of the gospel, and there were deceived professing Christians who attended the church but who needed to hear the summons to repent and believe. In his ministry, Timothy was an evangelist, and the more he grew in this area, the more opportunity there was for unbelievers to trust in Jesus.

Secondly and related, Paul instructed Timothy to "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching." Paul's directive here was not optional. "Persist in this," the apostle told his young protégé, "for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16). Paul is not teaching that Timothy would save himself by his own efforts, or that true salvation can be lost, or that his shepherding work was ultimately determinative for

the salvation of those in his congregation. Rather, Paul is reminding Timothy that God uses means to save His people, and the faithful teaching and personal holiness of a pastor is one of those vital means.

When Paul says that Timothy's attention to his teaching and living will "save" his hearers, he is not referring to initial salvation, but final salvation. That is, God will use competent, faithful pastors to enable his people—those who are already in possession of a secure salvation (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39)—to make it all the way to the end of their race and enter into heaven still believing in Jesus. One of the many fruits of a praying congregation is the salvation of sinners and their final perseverance in the faith.

Personal Encouragement to Grow

As you pray for your pastor according to his qualifications, responsibilities, and in light of his particular temptations and pressures, you will be encouraged to make progress in your own spiritual maturity. The qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 do not place a higher standard on pastors as though they were a separate, more spiritual class of Christian. Yes, a pastor *must* possess some measure of each of these virtues in order to remain fit for an oversight ministry, and he

will be judged according to greater strictness because he is a teacher (James 3:1). But Christians in all vocations should strive for the qualities outlined in the two passages of Scripture that discuss pastoral qualifications, and constant interaction with these texts as we pray for our pastors will tend to engender positive spiritual change in our own lives.

Love for Your Pastor

While I was in seminary, my wife and I attended a church led by a group of the most delightful and gracious men I have ever had the privilege to meet. I remember distinctly the time when the preaching pastor, from the pulpit, recounted his past ministry experience with stories of when church members would come to him, complaining about another staff member. Without fail, the pastor would meet their complaint with a question: “Have you prayed for them?” “No,” was the typical—almost universal—answer. But this pastor saw a powerful benefit of prayer in cases of personal complaint. Our hearts are generally softened toward the person with whom we have trouble when we begin to pray for their spiritual well-being, ministerial success, and joy in Christ. Indeed, it is nearly impossible when we intercede for others in this way to hold grudges, harbor bitterness, or nurture discontent. At the very

least, we will be able to handle our complaint in a way that serves rather than discourages the other person (see Prov 15:23).

When we pray for our pastors according to biblical categories, we will be far less likely to judge their ministry efforts unfairly or in an overly critical manner. Rather, we will find our hearts growing in love for our shepherds and for their families, and we will labor openly for their good rather than secretly for their harm. And, as our hearts are warmed toward our pastors, we will find ourselves better suited to hear their teaching and submit to Scripture as they deliver God's Word Sunday after Sunday.

A Happy Shepherd

Such prayer and love and genuine obedience to God's Word from one's congregation will make for a very happy shepherd. The author of Hebrews makes this connection plain when he writes, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb 13:17). When a congregation is praying for their pastor and their hearts are knit together with their pastor in love, obedience will tend to be the fruit. Such glad

obedience will cause joy in the pastor.

But note that the benefits shared between a pastor and his people are always reciprocal. The happy, obedient congregation makes for a happy pastor, and a happy pastor is of great advantage to his people. A joyful pastor is a productive, hard-working shepherd whose labor will consistently bless and edify his people.

Emerging Future Pastors

Another fruit of a congregation that prays for their pastor will be the emergence of future pastors from that congregation. I can think of few things better for sparking a genuine yet reverent desire for pastoral ministry in the hearts of men than constant prayer for their pastor over biblical texts that speak directly to an elder's qualifications, duties, and special temptations. Christian men who have an interest in pastoral ministry and who are in prayer regularly for their pastors according to God's Word will entertain their desires with spiritual sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and an informed outlook on what pastoral ministry demands.

Many Good Reasons to Pray for Your Pastor

How To Pray For Your Pastor

As we have seen in the last five chapters, there are many good reasons to pray for our pastors. But we can't stop here. In the concluding chapter, I will consider the need for perseverance in praying for our pastors, how we might ensure that our prayers are effective, and provide a few practical ideas to help you make the most of this book's message.

6

CONCLUSION

When I think over my pastoral roles and responsibilities, there are few things that comfort me more than the knowledge that the people of my local congregation are praying regularly for me, my wife, and my children. I hope you take to heart what has been written in these pages and consider the necessity and overwhelming benefit of praying for your pastor, for I trust he feels the same.

In the previous chapters I noted that Scripture not only calls us to pray for our pastors, but that such prayer is a vital means of grace for those who shepherd your local congregation—for they are desperate men in need of strength, wisdom, and spiritual power. When you make it a priority to pray for your pastor, you are serving

not only your pastor; you are serving your whole congregation and anyone else who benefits from your pastor's ministry.

Prayer for your pastors also nurtures a heartfelt love for the men who lead your church week in and week out. Pastors experience much grief from the hands of prayerless church members whose raw words of suggestion, correction, or rebuke have yet to be refined by genuine supplication to Jesus on their behalf. It may be right for you to suggest large or small-scale changes in the church. It may be time to correct your pastor on something he mistakenly says nearly every week from the pulpit. And there may be occasions when it is entirely appropriate to rebuke your pastor in private for the careless word he spoke at the deacon's meeting last week. But unless we are in regular prayer for our pastors, we will rarely offer our suggestions, corrections, and rebukes in a way that benefits our pastors or furthers our own sanctification. Consistent prayer for our shepherds according to the biblical categories outlined in this book will purify our motives and season our speech when it comes time to offer our ideas or admonishments.

The Need for Perseverance in Prayer

I would be remiss, however, if I did not end this

book with a brief word on perseverance in prayer. God has designed genuine spiritual growth to occur slowly, even imperceptibly, which is why Scripture often uses agricultural and physiological examples to illustrate individual and corporate progress in the Christian life (see, for example, Matt 13:18-23; 1 Cor 3:6-7; Eph 4:12-13; Col 2:19). Indeed, it is the quick-growing plant that should give concern that it's growth is superficial and unlikely to endure seasons of drought (Matt 13:6, 21). This means we must be willing to think long-term with regard to praying for our pastors. We might, after reading this little book, be encouraged to begin praying earnestly for our pastors and include them in our daily devotions. After a few weeks or even months, however, we could be tempted to give up our new resolution because we don't see the biblical changes we hoped to see. But don't give up. For the sake of your pastors, your brothers and sisters in Christ, and your own walk with the Lord, keep on praying.

When we are weary of praying, our Lord encourages us to *keep asking*, *keep seeking*, and *keep knocking* because our heavenly Father loves to give good gifts to his children (Matt 7:7-11). He knows that we are tempted to stop praying for

requests that don't receive immediate response, so he gave parables to His disciples "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (see Luke 18:1-7). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul echoed Jesus' exhortation for endurance: "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Gal 6:9). Note that the reaping is conditional on our perseverance in well doing. If we desire to enjoy the fruit of our prayers for our pastors, we must, by God's grace, *continue* in prayer for them.

Praying According to God's Will

The primary reason I structured this book around the pastor's qualifications, roles, and specific pressures and temptations is because I desire our prayers for our pastors to be effective. There are two essential components to effective Christian prayer. The first is given in 1 John 4:21-23.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us.

The first component to effective prayer is a clean conscience. That is what John refers to when he says, “if our heart does not condemn us” (v. 21). We are able to keep a clean conscience by regularly confessing our sins (1 John 1:5-10), trusting in Jesus’ atonement on the cross (1 John 1:7; 2:2) and walking in righteousness and love (1 John 2:5, 15-17, 28-29; 3:11, 16-18). When we “keep [God’s] commandments and do what pleases him” we can have confidence that “whatever we ask we receive from him.” The second component to effective Christian prayer is found a little later in 1 John 5:14-15.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

The second element to effective Christian prayer is praying according to God’s will. John does not hesitate to make the astounding claim that those who pray according to God’s will “have the requests that we have asked of him” (v. 15). If we want God to hear and answer our prayers for our pastors, then we must make sure that we are

praying according to God's will in the matter. And the only way to pray for our pastors according to God's will is by praying according to God's Word. Framing our study around the pastor's qualifications, responsibilities, and unique temptations helps us think according to God's Word on this vital topic and grants us the confidence that God hears our prayers and delights to answer them.

So Now What?

So how might you use this book most beneficially? Let me offer you a few suggestions before we conclude.

- 1. Determine today to pray regularly for your pastors.** If God has impressed upon your heart through His Word the importance of praying for your shepherds, do not neglect this encouragement from the Holy Spirit. Our hearts grow numb to the truth if we do not act on these spiritual experiences of conviction and admonishment. Make a plan to pray for your pastor and put your plan into action.
- 2. Set reasonable goals.** It is possible, however, in your zeal to make the most of what the Lord has taught you through his

Word, to establish lofty, unrealistic goals for prayer. But if you usually don't pray for a total of an hour each morning, then planning to pray for an hour each morning *for your pastor* probably isn't going to happen. Instead, plan to include your pastor in your prayers for a couple minutes a day. If you pray for certain people on specific days of the week, set aside a day when you pray for your church and for your pastor.

- 3. Pray through each biblical category in this book.** As you pray, it might be helpful to guide your time of devotion by praying through the biblical categories outlined in this book. For example, you could pray for one pastoral qualification (chapter 2), responsibility (chapter 3), or temptation (chapter 4) on a given day as you work sequentially through the book.
- 4. Gather other church members and regular attenders around you.** As you plan to pray for your pastor, involve others at your church so that many people in your local congregation might devote themselves to praying for the life and ministry of your

shepherds. You might establish a once-a-month prayer group or meet regularly with a good friend to pray specifically for your overseers.

5. **Inform your pastor.** As you begin to pray more intentionally for your pastor, let him know. He will be encouraged to hear that he can rely upon your prayers to keep him qualified, to empower his ministry, and to aid him in fending off the devil and his many schemes.
6. **Help others pray for their pastor.** As you grow in your understanding of what a biblical ministry entails and how such understanding should inform your prayers, it is possible that you turn inward and think *only* of your particular congregation. Yes, we should desire that God richly bless our local church with spiritual growth and health. But it is easy to turn even this good desire into a kind of competition where we look down on churches that are not as healthy as ours. You can counter this temptation to corporate self-righteousness by actively helping others pray for their pastors. As you meet with friends and

relatives from other churches, share with them what you have learned from Scripture about praying for your pastor, and encourage them to pray according to biblical categories for the good of their local congregation, the community, the world, and even their own walk with Jesus.

7. **Don't give up.** I've said it already, but it bears repeating: don't give up praying for your pastor. As you practically apply the truths we studied in this book, you will find that your flesh, the devil, and the world will conspire to discourage you from persevering in prayer for those who serve as your shepherds. Our indwelling sin and slothfulness will entice us to abandon our resolutions once we meet with spiritual struggle, mental tiredness, or simple busyness. A biblical ministry is a force for tremendous, eternal good in the world, and Satan will not rejoice at the prospect of stronger pastors and spiritually healthy churches. And the predominant, anti-supernatural worldview that pervades much of our culture will tempt you to think your prayers are little more than superstition. But don't give up. Remain in the Scripture,

remind yourself at what is at stake by considering the biblical categories we have studied in this book, and keep praying for your pastor.

Conclusion

Your pastor is a desperate man. Christ has entrusted to him a task that made even the formidable apostle Paul cry out, “Who is sufficient for these things” (2 Cor 2:16)? He needs grace to remain qualified; he needs wisdom and perseverance to carry out his responsibilities; he needs power in his preaching; he needs patience in his counseling; he needs holiness in his personal life; and he needs authenticity in his walk with Jesus. He needs your prayers. Pray for your pastor.

NOTES

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