

Your Pastor Is on the Firing Line—Please Pray!

This Sunday is Pastor Appreciation Day. Here are six specific ways to pray for your spiritual leaders.

Often when I speak to a group of aspiring ministers, I greet them by saying: “Welcome to the war.” I also remind them that when they signed up to join the front lines of spiritual battle, a bright red target was painted on their backs. Ministry can be wonderfully rewarding, but let’s not kid anybody: Most of the time it’s a thankless job full of headaches, disappointments, conflicts, loneliness, frustration, petty complaints and tight budgets.

And while we might assume all pastors lead megachurches and drive new cars, keep in mind that the average church in this country has 75 members and the average pastor makes less than \$34,000 a year—and may work an extra job to feed his or her family. The statistics are alarming: 90 percent of pastors work more than 50 hours a week; 70 percent say they don’t have any close friends; and 45 percent say they’ve had to take a leave of absence from ministry because of depression or burnout.

My friend Eddie Taylor, pastor of Church on the Hill in Dalton, Ga., has faced his share of ministry pressures and has looked burnout square in the face a few times. He dug deep in the story of Elijah (see 1 Kings 17-19) to learn how to survive, and he recently shared with me a message about how to pray for people in leadership. I decided to share his main points since October is Clergy Appreciation Month.

I’m sure your pastor would appreciate a nice card next Sunday, but he or she would be doubly blessed to know that you were praying regularly along these lines:

1. Pray against witchcraft and manipulation. As soon as Elijah stepped into the fray and challenged Israel's idolatry, Jezebel went into attack mode. We must never be ignorant of Satan's schemes (see 2 Cor. 2:11). The enemy targets Christian leaders, aiming to pull them into immorality, deception or pride; or he dispatches human messengers to control or discourage them. You can expose these demonic plots through prayer.

2. Pray for courage. Elijah had guts. He not only got in Ahab's face, but he also organized a public showdown to challenge Jezebel's false prophets. Yet right after the fire fell from heaven in response to Elijah's prayer, Jezebel threatened him—and the Bible says "he was afraid and arose and ran for his life" (1 Kings 19:3, NASB). Leaders are called to confront, but they can't do it without supernatural boldness from God. Ask the Lord to make your pastor brave.

3. Pray against depression. After Elijah fled to the wilderness, he started acting like a burned-out pastor. He prayed: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life" (19:4). It's normal for leaders to have emotional highs and lows, but when discouragement becomes debilitating it can knock them out for good. Pray that your pastor will draw fresh joy from the wells of salvation daily.

4. Pray for rest. After the intensity of Mount Carmel, Elijah went a day's journey from Beersheeba and slept under a juniper tree. Sometimes what pastors need most is a day off—yet many feel driven to perform, either because of people's expectations or self-imposed demands. What makes matters worse is that many pastors have not empowered others to help with the workload. Pray that your pastor not only gets enough sleep, but that he or she gets times of refreshing away from phone calls, e-mails and constant "emergencies" that can surely wait.

5. Pray for the touch of God. Elijah found supernatural

strength after his wearying experience on the mountaintop—not just because he ate and slept but because the angel of the Lord touched him twice (see 19:6-7). Pray that your pastor receives a double portion of the Lord’s presence. It is only the Lord’s supernatural anointing that enables us to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. Pray for disciples. Even after Elijah heard God’s voice on Mount Horeb, he was tempted to think he was the only true prophet left. But the Lord told him there were 7,000 prophets who had not bowed their knees to Baal, and He instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor (see 19:15-18). God does not want leaders to do their work alone. We are called to a long-distance race that involves multiple generations! Pray that your pastor will arrange his priorities correctly so he can invest his life in younger leaders.

P.S.—Don’t hand this list to your pastor next Sunday and tell him or her that you are praying these things. (As in, “Pastor, I’m praying you will have the courage to confront the gossips in this church—especially Mrs. Clack!”) No one wants to feel manipulated by prayer requests. Instead, pray in secret—and ask the Lord to uphold your pastor with the same grace He gave Elijah.

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