

5 Things Your Pastor Wished You Knew

I have a special place in my heart for pastors. It makes sense. If I were a mechanic, maybe I'd have a soft spot for those who turn wrenches. But I'm a pastor and because of that, I have a deep affection for those who shepherd in the local church. Partly because pastoring is often just an impossible task. Existing, established churches give job descriptions that are more fitting to CEOs, accountants and outside salesmen. Not to mention that preaching/teaching week in and week out, while an honor, requires a boatload of preparation, often resulting in very little positive feedback. The pay isn't always great either. I don't personally know any pastors who stepped into vocational ministry to get rich, but a living wage from their church would be a kind gesture. Yep, ministry is hard.

I know what you're thinking. Jon, go cry me a river. If ministry is so hard, these guys should go do something easier. They knew what they were getting into. Tell them to quit being a crying baby.

No argument here. I think you're right. Some guys just aren't cut out for the nitty-gritty pace and pressure that comes with pastoral calling. Some need to reevaluate, cut bait and go work somewhere else. I really believe that. But there are hundreds of thousands of pastors who have a substantial calling from God. They moved to your city, they live humbly, love sacrificially, counsel with compassion and operate with integrity.

Local pastors are my heroes. Truly.

However, because pastors don't want to be labeled complainers or weak-kneed, there are some things they just can't (or

won't) tell you. They want to keep the attention off themselves and on Jesus and your needs. They're not trying to be martyrs, just conscientious. I don't mind telling you though. I'll be the tattletale. I'm telling you because you need to know. If you are part of a local church, this is what your pastor wishes you knew about him, but he's too afraid (or kind or nervous or self-conscious) to tell you.

I struggle too. Pastors are not immune to feeling a little lost and out of sync. The way you feel on Monday mornings about going to work? They feel that too sometimes. Maybe a lot of times. I know they look the part on Sunday morning and sound all preachy and authoritative behind the 300-pound oak pulpit, but they struggle just like you. They wonder if this is everything God has for them. Dark thoughts sneak in—*There's got to be more to life than this.* Just. Like. You.

I feel lonely. Most pastors don't have many friends. I'm not really sure why. They have all the right tools to be amazing friends—compassion, a listening ear, empathy. I was talking to one pastor recently and he told me, "I have lots of people who think we're friends. But what that really feels like is I'm the one being a good friend. And when it comes time for me to need a friend, they just don't know how to let me be a normal person." This loneliness stems from some unhealthy church cultures (pastor/laity separation) and often from some unhealthy personal issues, but either way, it's real.

I'm not an employee. Nobody likes to be treated like a hireling. But more churches than ever are treating their incoming pastors like one. Of course, there is a tension to manage here. On the one hand, pastors are accountable and are required to fulfill particular roles and tasks—like an employee. They get paid by the church—like an employee. A pastor is more than an employee, though. Unfortunately, sometimes it feels like he's the only one who knows that. He knows he doesn't work by the hour and punch a clock. He serves the church with pleasure and feels the weight of shepherding

people in their most difficult moments. He's not looking for double honor, just a bit of patience and grace as he walks alongside you.

My family pays a price to be here. Pastor's families are akin to military families—they go where the action is. Husbands and wives and children pack up the home, fill up a U-Haul and drive to a city they've never even heard of because a church has asked them to. It's part of the calling. But that calling is costly. Kids are leaving behind friendships. Mom and Dad leave behind roots that were planted. And what seems romantic (new schools, new neighborhoods, new churches) is absolutely terrifying. Just know ... your pastor and his family are courageous for just showing up.

I'm not Jesus. This should go without saying, but he wants you to know that he's not the Son of God. Not the Creator. Not the sustainer of all things. He doesn't have the power to fix your problems. If he did, you'd just screw it up again. He can't mend your jacked-up family. He can't make you quit smoking. He can't make you love your husband. He's not Jesus. Quit looking to him as if he were. He's just the messenger and undershepherd of this thing called the church.

I could add a dozen more without even blinking—*I want you to like me; Stop being a jerk to people; Have you considered going to another church?*—but the point is that your pastor is a person. Love him, enjoy him while he's around, and be patient. He's just like you—broken and in need of grace. {eoa}

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