

Please Pray for the Wounded Shepherds

America's most prominent pastor, Rick Warren, and his wife, Kay, lost their 27-year-old son, Matthew, to suicide earlier this year. The Warrens grieved privately for months. When they finally spoke publicly with CNN's Piers Morgan about the tragedy in September, they offered comfort to every family that has ever battled the reality of **mental illness**.

They also showed the nation that pastors are people too—and they hurt just like the rest of us.

Last weekend, one of the nation's most prominent Pentecostal pastors bared his soul to say something no one wants to admit publicly. Ron Carpenter Jr., founder of Redemption World Outreach Center in Greenville, S.C., told thousands of his congregants on Oct. 13 that his wife of 23 years, Hope, had been involved in inappropriate relationships and that she had been admitted to a **rehab** facility.

"Hope is not well," Carpenter said. "I am bearing the expense of one year of treatment that is extensive ... and I am committed totally and completely to my kids one day having a mother that is whole and that is well."

Carpenter and his wife are the most visible pastors in their denomination, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC). His late father was a presiding bishop of the group, and Redemption World Outreach Center became a phenomenon in the 1990s because it broke the color barrier in a Southern city known for its racial divisions.

The Carpenters grew up in small towns in South Carolina. Hope was a cheerleader from Calhoun Falls while Ron lived in Possum Kingdom, which he jokingly refers to as "a wide place in the road." Graduates of IPHC's Emmanuel College, the couple fell

in love as students, married in 1990 and began Redemption the next year in a drab warehouse with a handful of people. Today the church has thousands of members, and Ron, who is only 44, leads an apostolic network with 1,400 affiliated ministers who look to him for covering.

But Ron Carpenter was not in his typical spitfire preaching mode last Sunday. He was a broken man, and he sobbed uncontrollably at one point as he shared how the crisis in his home has affected his children. While he admitted that he doesn't plan to stay married, he asked for prayers for his wife.

"She does not need wrath [or] anger; she needs prayer, she needs support and she needs **miracles**," Ron said of Hope.

This is not how any of us would have scripted Ron and Hope Carpenter's story. This is not supposed to happen. We expect pastors to have fairy tale marriages and ideal families. When pastors face issues such as adultery, divorce, mental illness or even prodigal children, it doesn't compute. They are our role models, so we expect perfection. And when imperfections appear, we are often quick to judge.

Since October has been designated **Pastor Appreciation Month** (I tend to think we should appreciate our leaders every month!), I offer a few guidelines on how to pray for your pastors.

Pray for protection. I personally believe Satan targets leaders. That doesn't mean our archenemy doesn't bother everyone else, but warriors on the front lines get blasted the hardest. This is why Paul appealed for prayers on his behalf (see 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1). Pray that God will shield your pastor from demonic attacks and temptations.

Pray for friends. So many pastors I know are lonely. Some struggle to share intimate information with church members because they have been betrayed in the past. Others can't open up about a family problem or a personal temptation to a

denominational leader because they fear being exposed. But leaders cannot stay healthy in isolation. Pray that your pastor develops a close support network.

Pray for rest. We've all heard horror stories of fat cat pastors who get big paychecks and expect royal treatment. But those guys are the exception, not the rule. Most pastors I know are overworked, underpaid and striving to serve their people—including those who gripe and complain every week but never put a dollar in the offering plate. Pastoring is often a thankless job. Pray that your pastor does not burn out. Better yet, after you've prayed, help raise an offering to send his or her family on a vacation!

Pray for joy. Way back in the 1800s, British preacher Charles Spurgeon admitted that he struggled with depression regularly. He said of the tiring work of ministry, "How often, on Lord's Day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers which a child might break." I can promise that your pastor feels regularly drained. He or she needs an infusion of God's presence and joy to replenish the soul.

When leaders like Rick Warren or Ron Carpenter admit their weaknesses, we shouldn't kick them when they are down. Hold the complaints and accusations—it is Satan's job to accuse. Do the opposite and bless your pastors—and pray for strength, comfort, healing and joy to sustain them through every trial.

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