

Your Pastor Is Under ATTACK! What Will You Do?

Hell has unleashed a coordinated assault against spiritual leaders. Are you willing to provide extra prayer covering to protect them?

I wasn't feeling especially spiritual—I was just trying to decide which carpet color I liked best. But God had other plans for me that afternoon.

Jerry, a stout 60-year-old flooring salesman, had come into my office to show me some carpet for our church. We had never met, so we chatted briefly about his business.

After a quick orientation on material and pricing options, I dove into the bulky sample books he had plunked down on my desk. I think I was considering the virtues of a soft geometric pattern when I looked up and was caught completely by surprise:

Jerry's broad shoulders were shuddering. He was red in the face, trying hard to hold back his tears.

"Are you OK?" I asked, feeling somewhat awkward.

"I'm sorry, it's just that this is hard for me. I used to be a pastor like you. Coming back to a church setting like this for the first time is difficult."

"What happened?" I inquired, trying to imagine what drove his pain.

"The constant pressure in our church on top of the painful physical attacks my wife was having almost ate me up emotionally. I became a nervous wreck. I got to the place that I knew if that phone rang just one more time, I'd lose it.

“So my wife and I packed up and walked away after 30 years of ministry. It tore us up. We still love God, but the constant battles”

Jerry's voice trailed off. His head tilted down and his hands covered his eyes in shame. Before I knew it, I was on my knees beside this broken man. He gripped my hand. I asked the Lord to restore his wounded spirit and heal his broken heart.

Pastors in Pain

Jerry is not alone. In fact, nearly everywhere I travel, I meet pastors who are hurting. A wave of trouble seems to have been unleashed against the church, and spiritual leaders are getting hit with the worst of it. Many of God's servants are facing sickness, financial problems, frustrating reversals and unimaginable family tragedies.

What is happening? The Bible warned that the end times would be stressful and difficult. Yet many of us are discerning that something beyond tough times is in play.

I believe there is an all-out assault from the enemy against spiritual leaders. Satan knows what we must be reminded of today: “‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered,’” (Mark 14:27, NKJV). For that reason, I believe unless we learn to provide our spiritual leaders with a protective shield of prayer, our churches and ministries will never fully change our cities with the gospel.

It's no secret that pastors and other spiritual leaders live with continual pressure. Leaders often have tougher paths to walk than those who follow them. The harvest fields they work in are booby-trapped with spiritual and emotional land mines hidden there by the enemy.

The statistics should disturb us. For example, did you know that hundreds of pastors in North America leave the ministry every month because of stress, burnout and failure? The

numbers also reveal that:

97 percent of pastors say they were inadequately trained for the challenges they face

80 percent say pastoral ministry has had a negative effect on their children

70 percent say they constantly fight depression

70 percent say they feel underpaid

71 percent say they are in financial trouble

65 percent say they have thought about quitting the ministry within the last 30 days

70 percent say they do not have someone they consider a close friend.

If these figures are correct, we have a crisis on our hands. If these terrible trends hold true over time, the damage will be devastating.

In the midst of this enemy advance, where have all the watchmen gone? The honest truth is that many of us are dozing. Like the disciples who slept while Jesus faced His most difficult hours, we often do the same with those whose victory is so important to us.

Are you praying and fasting for your spiritual leaders? Others are, but not in the way you might think. Many of us are now aware that witches routinely fast and pray for the downfall of our Christian leaders.

Spiritual warfare specialist Ed Murphy tells a shocking story of a conversation he had on an airplane with an occult leader who admitted that he and others were fasting for key spiritual leaders to fall into sickness and disgrace.

The truth is, pastors too often go unsupported during these times of attack. One significant pastor I know suffered a massive heart attack and then a stroke from ministry pressure. Shortly afterward more than 100 families left his big-city church.

Their reason? They thought his faith was not strong enough. If he had been a true man of God, they reasoned, these things would not have happened to him.

We had better figure out whose side we are on and keep our eyes open. David made it clear that failing to properly protect your leader is a serious sin (see 1 Sam. 26:13-15).

Saul's commanders were sleeping when they should have been shielding, and an enemy was able to slink in by cover of night. We must avoid being drowsy disciples if our churches and ministries are to advance.

The Command to Cover

What can we do? God is calling believers to pray prayers of protection over their leaders so the entire church can prevail against the enemy's attacks, move forward and take cities for God. Supporting leaders means protecting them from enemy fire so they can advance and make a way for us all to come into our places.

Scripture commands us to cover our spiritual leaders with protective prayers. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence," (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Paul told the Philippians that Epaphroditus had nearly died for the cause of his ministry, and urged them to honor him and care for him in light of that fact (see Phil. 2:25-30).

The people who respond to this call play an enormous role in the kingdom of God. Pastors and leaders worldwide will attest to this.

In our own church, we are blessed with devoted intercessors who make it their aim to cover our pastoral team every time

they gather for prayer, often fasting for days and then surrounding us physically, praying for our needs. On occasion, they e-mail us or drop us notes filled with loving and sensitive insight birthed through their hours of prayer.

This kind of support is invaluable to spiritual leaders because it empowers us to do God's work without endless demonic hindrances. Emotionally, I can't tell you how it makes me feel to know that my marriage, family, ministry and personal life are shielded with daily prayer by faithful intercessors who have responded to the command to cover.

If you are an intercessor, and you watch in prayer over your leaders, you are a vital part of the plan of God for your region.

Opening City Gates

There is a powerful link between this kind of prayer and the advancement of the gospel (see 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 2 Thess. 3:1). Intercession for spiritual leaders enables us to strip the enemy of territory and claim the harvest for the Lord in our cities.

We cannot forget that when the early church prayed for the apostle Peter in a time of crisis, citywide revival was released. Think about the story of Peter's imprisonment in Acts 12: He not only was imprisoned during a widespread persecution of the church, but he also was bound between two soldiers, and four squads of soldiers were assigned to guard him. Surely this is a prophetic glimpse of the overwhelming resistance that key leaders face.

But Scripture says constant prayer was made by the church for Peter's release. After a glorious visitation by angels and a dramatic jailbreak in answer to a nonstop prayer storm, something incredible happened that we cannot miss: Peter was led to the city's iron gate—which opened of its own accord (see Acts 12:10).

I believe this is a compelling picture of how intercession for leaders will lead to even the most stubborn gateways opening in our cities.

In the same way, the key to a prevailing church or nation is having the right spirit in place to prayerfully support leaders. I am convinced that we will see more reconciliation, financial provision, miracles of healing and personal breakthroughs than ever before if we will learn the secret of supporting those whom God has placed over us. When we back our leaders, we are victorious, and the gospel goes forth in new power.

Build a Prayer Shield

How you can provide covering:

Remember your leaders each time you pray.

If your church has prayer meetings, make it a practice to physically surround your spiritual leaders each time they are present for a few minutes of intensive prayer.

If your church does not have a functional prayer shield in place over your spiritual leaders, seek permission to create one. Gather like-minded prayer warriors, study good materials on the subject, and make it your mission to pray over your church or ministry leaders.

When you pray for leaders, be sensitive to the issues they commonly face and pray accordingly. Come against the attacks of the enemy in the areas of distraction, temptation, discouragement, burnout and physical sickness. Pray for an impartation of faith, focus, wisdom, leadership and fruitfulness to remain upon their lives.

If you sense God is showing you something for them, offer to share it with them. When you have their permission, be

positive, brief, discreet and humble. Then leave it in God's hands with no strings attached. You may be a greater source of encouragement than you realize as you continue to pray for your leaders.

David Cannistraci pastors GateWay City Church in San Jose, California. He travels internationally as a speaker and is the author of several books, including Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement and God's Vision for Your Church (Regal Books).