

I Am A Church Member **(Small Group Bible Study)**

Session 4: "I Will Pray For My Church Leaders"

Opening Illustration & Introduction

The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development has been studying the lives and ministries of pastors since 1989. Here are some of their findings:

Hours and Pay

- 90% of pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- 50% feel unable to meet the demands of the job.
- 70% of pastors feel grossly underpaid.

Training and Preparedness

- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with the ministry demands.
- 90% of pastors said the ministry was completely different than what they thought it would be like before they entered the ministry.

Health and Well-Being

- 90% of pastors stated they are frequently fatigued, and worn out on a weekly and even daily basis.
- 80% of pastors feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastor.
- 71% of pastors are burned out (beyond normal fatigue).
- 70% of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Only 23% of pastors report being happy and content in their identity in Christ, in their church, and in their home.

Spirituality

- 72% of the pastors we surveyed stated that they only studied the Bible when they were preparing for sermons or lessons. This left only 38% who read the Bible for devotions and personal study.
- 26% of pastors said they *regularly* had personal devotions and felt they were adequately fed spirituality.

Marriage and Family

- 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families.
- 80% of spouses feel the pastor is overworked.
- 80% of spouses feel left out and under-appreciated by church members.

Church Relationships

- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 40% report serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.

Longevity

- 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates will leave the ministry within 5 years.
- Only 10% of pastors will actually retire as a minister in some form.
- Over 1,500 pastors leave the ministry every month.
- Over 1,300 pastors are terminated by the local church each month.
- 50% of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.



Do these statistics concerning pastors surprise you? Why or why not? Do these statistics concerning pastors concern you?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture calls church members to be vigilant to pray for the pastor and other church leaders on a consistent basis. Pastors and church leaders have a difficult job and yet shepherding souls is a huge responsibility. Satan knows that if he take out the pastor, the sheep will scatter. Your pastor and church leaders need your prayers more than you could ever know.

****Take some time to read through the introduction of this chapter in the book.**



In light of the story in this chapter, why do you think pastors and church leaders need prayer on a consistent basis?

Church Members Are Called To Pray For The Pastor And Church Leaders

The biblical commands to pray for pastors and church leaders are subtle. Paul is the greatest champion of this idea and it appears several times in his letters to churches. Consider these verses:

Romans 15:30-31

30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

Colossians 4:2

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:18

16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

1 Thessalonians 5:25

25 Brothers, pray for us.

2 Thessalonians 3:1

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

Hebrews 13:18

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.



As you consider these verses, what are the primary reasons that Paul asks for prayer?

When you take inventory of these verses, you recognize quickly that Paul covets prayers from these church members for boldness and opportunity to proclaim the gospel, protection as he deals with hostile non-believers and integrity as he fulfills his God-ordained ministry.

As we consider the responsibility church members have to pray for their pastor, it is helpful to consider the three practical areas of a pastor's life, which Rainer noted in the book, that should be lifted up in prayer:

1. Pray For The Pastor And His Family

It has often been said that a pastors and their families are a lot like fish living in a glass fish bowl. Everyone pays attention to see if the pastor and his wife ever have an argument and whether or not their kids are well behaved. This is understandable when we consider the biblical responsibility pastors have to manage their household well (1 Timothy 3:5). But, this is immense pressure and pastors and their families feel the weight of this pressure constantly. Rainer wrote:

“I have heard countless pastors worry about and struggle over their families. They worry that they neglect their families because of the demands of the church. They worry about their families living in a

glass house. They anguish when critics direct barbs at family members. You get the picture. We are church members. We must be the prayer intercessors for pastors and their families. Few families face the kinds of pressures and expectations as the families of pastors.”



What are your expectations of the pastor and his family? Are these biblical expectations? Do you pray for the pastor and his family on a regular basis?

As you look at the role of pastors and their family, consider this open letter, written by Thom Rainer on his blog, thanking the pastor’s wife:

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most thankless roles in the world. You receive no compensation, but there are many expectations of you. At times you are expected to be omnipresent; and other times you are expected to be invisible. Rarely at any of those times does anyone express gratitude to you.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most selfless roles in the world. You are expected to be at the beck and call of church members, regardless of your own schedule. You are expected to adjust your life to the life of the pastor, who just happens to be your husband. You really have no independent life of your own.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most challenging roles in the world. You are the only person in whom your husband can truly confide. When he is down, you are expected to encourage and exhort him. You try to provide balance for your family and children, especially since some of the church members expect them to be perfect.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the most painful roles in the world. You have discovered how hurtful some church members can really be. You listen to criticisms of your husband, and you are expected to be stoic. And when you are hurt, you think you have to keep it to yourself. You internalize it and hurt even more.

Thank you pastor’s wife.

You may have one of the loneliest roles in the world. People in the church seem afraid to get too close to you. Friendships are rare, if not non-existent. There are times you want to cry out in your need and pain, but there is no one to listen to you. In your darkest moments, you wonder if it's all really worth it.

Thank you pastor's wife.

We who stand on the sidelines may not know your hopes, hurts, and needs. We may not realize the depth of your times of pain and loneliness. But we know Someone who does. And He is with you. He is your strength. He is your comforter. He is your confidant.

And one day you will see that Savior named Jesus face to face. One day you will get your rewards for your labor, sacrifice, and love. One day He will look at you with unstoppable love and piercing eyes. One day He will say, "Well done good and faithful servant. Well done."

And then you will know it was all worthwhile.

Thank you pastor's wife.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Pastors and their families are under spiritual attack constantly. Satan would love nothing more than to bring discouragement and discord into the life of the pastor. One of the easiest ways for this to happen is to attack his family. Pray for the pastor and his family!

2. Pray For The Pastor's Protection

To say that pastors have a target on their back is an understatement. We have all heard of stories of pastors who have failed morally. This is usually followed by great distress in the church and discord in the community. Consider this passage from 1 Timothy 3:2-4 regarding a pastor's qualifications:

2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive...

Pastors are called to be "above reproach" in their life and ministry. When we consider what is meant by these words, we recognize just how important it is to lift our pastors up in prayer. Rainer wrote:

“Just to get past ‘the above reproach’ part is an accomplishment! The word reproach means ‘to find fault.’ So to be ‘above reproach’ means to be above finding fault. While the pastor is certainly not expected to be perfect, he is to have a reputation above most everyone else. When people in the community speak or think about the pastor, the thoughts and words should be positive and encouraging.”



What does it mean for the pastor to be “above reproach?” Is that standard even possible?

It is important for us to recognize that Paul continues, concerning the qualifications of pastors, by stating in 1 Timothy 3:7:

7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

In the same way that we might set a mousetrap out to catch a mouse in our house, we must recognize that this is the same kind of language used by Paul concerning the activity of the devil. He is skillfully setting out traps to try and catch pastors. Rainer wrote:

“If we understand the full implications of that word (trap), we wouldn’t hesitate to pray for our pastor’s protection. A trap is something that is set intentionally. It means that the devil has devised a plan to bring the pastor down. He has set a trap. It means that the devil sees the pastor as a threat, and one of his highest priorities is to take him down and take him out. And the text is clear. The nature of this trap will be temptation where the pastor’s reputation will be harmed.”



Why do you think the devil is setting traps for pastors? Knowing this, how much more of a sense of urgency do you feel to pray for your pastor?

Even though the devil is working overtime to try and pick off pastors and shipwreck their ministries, we can be certain that our prayers are powerful. God is much more powerful than the devil and he works in amazing ways through the prayers of his people. Pray for your pastor’s protection!

3. Pray For Your Pastor’s Physical And Mental Health

If you have ever had responsibility to care for someone else, maybe a child or elderly parent, you know how much of a burden that can be. Pastors experience this same burden in the care for the souls of those under his ministry. In fact, James warns that not many should become pastors/teachers because they are held to greater accountability for those under their care and

teaching (James 3:1).

Rainer wrote:

“Serving and leading a church well expends all of a pastor’s energy. He is on call every day and every hour. Because the demands are so great on him, the pastor often neglects his own health and well-being. While no one is invulnerable to sickness and accidents, we can pray for the protection of our pastor’s health. We should also pray for our pastor’s mental health. In this regard I’m not referring to the opposite of mental sickness as I am to wisdom. The pastor has to make dozens of decisions each week that require discernment and wisdom. He needs wisdom to know what to preach and teach and how to present God’s Word. He needs wisdom dealing with us church members each week so he can best discern how to respond to the plethora of demands upon him.”

Pastoral ministry is a burden and it is also a great joy. Pray for your pastor’s physical and mental health as he seeks to care for your soul and the souls of other church members!



Why do you think pastors often overlook their own physical and mental health? What are some practical ways you can pray for and encourage your pastor in these areas?

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

The Fourth Pledge
I am a church member.

I will pray for my pastor every day. I understand that the pastor’s work is never ending. His days are filled with numerous demands that bring emotional highs and lows. He must deal with critics. He must be a good husband and father. Because my pastor cannot do all things in his power, I will pray for his strength and wisdom daily.

Sign and Date