

Special Messages of 2017

The Care and Feeding of a Pastor

Unedited Transcript

Dr. Joel Hunter

Well, I really appreciate the honor of talking to y'all. Pat is a good friend of mine. He's part of North, and every weekend when I'm preaching he sends me a prayer, 7:00 Sunday morning, no matter where he is in the world, and that guy travels a lot. When he said, "Hey can you do this for me because I'm headed toward the badlands", I said absolutely, because everybody appreciates Pat and his witness in this community for so many years. I said, "What do you want me to talk about?" He said, "Well, how about talking about pastors, because most of these guys have pastors and not a lot of people know what it's like to be a pastor or what scripture says about pastors." I said, "Easy, I can do that. That's like falling off a log to me." That's what we're going to talk about this morning.

First of all, let me read to you three passages in scripture that are important to note when it comes to pastors, your pastor in particular or your spiritual leader in particular. Let me tell you what I'm going to do this morning. I'm going to give you the human side. I grew up in a very formal church. All the men wore pinstripes on their suits and all the ladies had fruit on their hats. This is years ago. All the women wore church hats. Dr. Stanley Shumaker, our very distinguished pastor, I can still remember he preached from this high pulpit. At the end of the service he'd come down, robes flowing in the wind. It was like God passing by. The choir would sing "May the Lord bless you and keep you". Then he'd give the benediction in God's voice from the back. I thought, "Oh man, this man just came down", to mix metaphors, "from Mount Olympus."

Then at my 50 year class reunion, some of you guys can't imagine being at a fi-, but my 50 year class reunion, an old high school buddy of mine ... High school class reunion. I said, "Do you remember Dr. Shumaker?" He said, "Yeah. He was really a good buddy of my dad's. He used to come over with my dad and drink beer and play cards." I almost passed out. First of all, I was a Methodist. Methodists didn't drink beer, thank you very much, let alone play cards. My whole world got, "Wait a minute, you mean he was a guy? You mean he did guy things?" I want to give you just a picture of how your pastor is probably not coming down from Mount Olympus, probably just from the next block, has the same concerns you do, little different life.

I was talking with, is it Don over here, who said "If I had a choice between being in front of a firing squad and being a pastor, I'm not sure which I'd choose." I told him they're not very different. Let me read you these passages. The first one is ... By the way, I don't see a clock around here, so at 30 minutes into this will you give me, or whenever 7:30 is or 6:30? I don't know.

Okay, Hebrews 13, verses seven and 17. "Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you." Now this usually means pastors, but this could be the Bible study leaders here, this could be any spiritual leader in your life who speaks scripture into your life. "Consider the outcome of their way of life and

imitate their faith. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account." This is the fear and trembling of being a pastor. We're responsible for at least the example and the interpretation of the word to the congregation and we're going to have to give an account to that for God.

"Do this so their work will be a joy and not a burden. For that would be of no benefit to you." All right, now this is to pastors and spiritual leaders, 1 Peter chapter five, verses one through three, "Therefore, I exalt the elders among you", this is especially the teaching elders, "as you fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and partaker of the glory that is to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God among you. Exercise in oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily." You know, somebody who has a spirit of compulsion, they ask somebody how they're doing, they go, "Oh, I got to do what I'm doing. I hate it, but I got to do it." You will never lead very many people, or anybody in your life with that kind of spirit.

This is the pastor saying don't go around like that. Don't go around like somebody just placed a 900 pound weight on your shoulders. "Make it a voluntary thing, according to the will of God, not for sorted gain, but with eagerness, nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples for the flock." That's the mandate we have to live as examples.

Then Ephesians four, 11 through 13. I want to differentiate in your mind the difference between a pastoral gift and a pastoral role. A lot of these folks who have different gifts ... See, he gave that are different gifts to the church. "He gave some as Apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers". Now that's a different wiring. There are many of us, I'm wired to be an apostle, but I'm in a pastoral role. Some people are wired to be prophets but they're in a pastoral role. Some people are wired to be evangelists but they're in a pastoral role. Some people are wired to be pastors, they're natural shepherds. "For the equipping of the saints for the work of service", this is our job, to grow people up so that y'all can do the ministry.

The ministry is a superintendency. The ministry of a pastor is a superintendency. It's not to do ministry outside of what we personally can do, but it's to raise up ministers. "To the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Some of you know the name Peter Druker. Peter Druker was one of the main business gurus historically ever, smartest person when it came to consulting. I set with him in a small group. Rick Warren was in that group, Kenton Beshore, I think Bill Hybels was in the group. Anyway, I remember thinking, "This guy is brilliant", Peter Druker. His whole talk was about what he read in the past two months. He was like in his 80s at that time. He was this perennial student.

Anyhow, he said, "These are the four toughest jobs in the United States, in no particular order: president of the United States, president of a university, CEO of a hospital, pastor." I don't really think that's wholly true, but I do know that being a pastor is difficult but not disagreeable work. Let me tell you something about your pastors. First of all, people become pastors because they care. They care about people. If you just are looking for some place to teach scripture, you're in the wrong profession. You ought to go to a seminary. Pastors become pastors because they care.

Now, this is what y'all know. Caring means that you carry the burden of the people you care about. That's what it means. This isn't an objective kind of role to have. There's a difference between pastors and shepherds. I hear people call pastors shepherds. Well, I've read shepherds, on what it's like to shepherd sheep. I want to tell you, people aint sheep. First of all, sheep are dumber than a rock.

Anybody who knows ... Yeah, I mean we're likened to sheep in scripture, and probably for good reason, but sheep are dumber than rock. Sheep really don't have an agenda of their own. Sheep don't calculate and manipulate. You know? People don't whisper behind the shepherds back.

Sheep are innocent, people aren't, so there's a difference between being a shepherd and a pastor. The difference is that as I said, caring costs. We're wired, and I think a lot of us are wired in the same way, we're wired to want to matter in a good way in people's lives. When you're wired like that, you care not only about how their lives are going, but about their appraisal of the impact you're having on their lives. Pastors do this often, I'll walk through the foyer every time I get done preaching. We'll get comments. The old style is the pastor stands at the back of the church and people go out and everybody shakes the pastors hand and, "Nice sermon. Good job", and all that kind of stuff.

You know what I'm about to say. If there is one negative comment, if one person comes through and says, "Pastor, yeah I just didn't even understand what you're talking about today" or "I totally disagree with your interpretation" or "Something you said just hit me wrong", and then they walk out, if there are 100 positive comments and one negative comment, guess which one he's going to remember. He's going to go home and that's going to eat him for lunch. I want you to know that your pastors don't feel ... A shepherd feels superior to the sheep. Pastors don't feel superior to the congregation. Pastors in a lot of ways have all the insecurities everybody else has exaggerated, because they take on the insecurities. They're always overwhelmed. I mean, if they have any sense about them at all they're overwhelmed. If a pastor really knows what he's doing, that's a dangerous man.

They're always ... I can remember, some of have heard this, some of you have been around me long enough to hear many of my stories, but my mother died, or my father died, I'm sorry, when I was four years old. It was my mother and my sister and I. My mother turned to me at four years old and said, "Okay, now you're the man of the house." Well, four years old, you know, she said man. I was totally overwhelmed with that responsibility. Let me tell you what she did. When we went to the grocery store she'd say, "You're the man of the house. You have to pay." Well, I didn't have any money. When we got to the cashier she'd slip me the money just in time. When the paper boy came, we used to have paper delivered, and somehow we afforded the paper. When the paper boy came to the door, "Well, you're the man of the house. You got to pay." She'd slip me the money.

I have lived all my life with this feeling of having an overwhelming responsibility, not having anything to contribute, not having any idea how to manage what I'm supposed to manage, but having this inkling that whenever I need what I need, God is going to slip it to me. Pastors are often overwhelmed, often feeling totally inadequate. I know some of you have set with people who have lost children and you had no idea what to say. I know some of you have been on holy ground, that's what that is, that's holy ground when there's been an unexpected death or a tragedy of multiple deaths or some unexplained and horrific diagnosis or something that just changes your whole life in an instant. I know you don't know what to say. Pastors don't either. Pastors don't have that answer. You can't just start quoting scripture. I mean, scripture is important, but there's no place for platitudes there, there's no place for religious cliches. Holy ground is not a place where you just try to provide something religious so that you don't have to face the pain with them.

Pastors do that all the time. We're called into holy ground. This is one of the high and sacred callings of the life of a pastor, but again, you don't have any answers. You shouldn't pretend that you have any answers. You just walk through that with people. That's what your pastor does. Pastors pay a pretty high

price for living a public life with their families. The expectations, for some reasons, are much higher for a pastor's family than other families. I get it. I get it, but it doesn't lessen the pressure that is felt.

Now I happen to be married to a fantastic woman who says, "This is great because we get to live our lives ..." Somebody once told her, "What's it like to live in a fishbowl?" She said, "Well, let's talk about that for a minute. You think fish mind living in a fishbowl?" The person was kind of taken back. The person said, "Well, no I guess not." That's right. What do fish do in a fishbowl? Well, they swim. That's what pastors do in a fishbowl. That's what pastor's wives do, we just pastor. We get to be in a place where people observe. If you're living the kind of life that you would like to have observed it's a pretty good deal.

That's not to feel sorry for a pastor, but just to realize there are different pressures on your pastor's family than if you were in air conditioning with Rich. You know? Now people expect their air conditioning to work, so there is pressure, but there's a different level of expectation.

Here's the next thing that you need to know. You can't educate a pastor enough to make him or her feel equipped to go into a parish. I taught at Reformed Theological Seminary for years. I taught Practical Theology, which is getting people ready to go into the pastorate for years and years. I'd had decades of pastoral experience, so I thought I was giving them a pretty good heads up. I bet I could go back to every one of those students and say, "Did I prepare you to go into your parish?", and every one of them would say no.

The stats are, this is from the Fuller Institute, 90% of the people who go into the pastorate say it's way different than they expected. Here's a bone crushing stat: 70% of pastors have a lower self image than when they started becoming a pastor. 70% have a lower self image than when they started becoming a pastor. Let me tell you kind of why that is, so that you can ... We'll get to the solutions here in just a moment, because we want you to pray for your pastors, and I want to give you a good reason and an urgency to do so.

First of all, pastors do face criticism, not because people are trying to take him down a peg or two, although there are always some of those, but because people are in pain. When you're in pain, hurt people hurt people. You've heard that before. Hurt people hurt people. When you're hurting, you take it out on whoever is in front of you. 50% of your congregation will come in on Sunday morning and be either mad at somebody or be disappointed or be going through a rough time in their life, and anything you say can and will be held against you because they're just mad. Yes, there's going to be criticism. Some of it is deserved. Somebody taught me a long time ago, I've always had pastoral mentors a generation ahead of me. They're all dead now. They're gone. I can't find them any longer, but coming in.

When I was a young pastor, this guy mentored me, and I was griping about the criticism I was receiving. He looked at me, he never, never gave me any quarter. He looked at me, and this is what he said, "How much of it is true?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "In every criticism there's enough truth to improve you." That's why criticism is valuable. It doesn't mean the whole criticism is valid. It doesn't even mean it should come to you as it did, but it came to you and if you believe in a sovereign God, every criticism has enough truth to improve you.

I've looked at criticism much differently since then. I want to tell you a thing or two about criticism. When you go to a pastor, and by the way please don't go to your pastor and start out a sentence like

this, "Now you know I love you.", because the next thing he's going to do is duck. He knows what's coming next. You know? Don't start a sentence out like this, "Now pastor, this isn't personal." All criticism is personal. You don't mean it personal and you don't have it in your head as personal, you're trying to get to an objective solution to something and you're trying to work with a real issue, and it doesn't mean you should never bring up the issues that you need to resolve together, but you need to know not only to a pastor but to all of us, for those things that we're responsible over, criticism is personal and you take it personally and you carry it around.

Secondly, pastors really get discouraged because people leave. This happens all the time in ministry. It's part of ministry. People stomp off or wander off. Many more people wander off than stumble off. There are very few people that just go, "That's it. I'm gone." People kind of nibble their way. This is true, you've heard me say this before, people nibble their way lost. Now that's not only true in sin, it's true in organized church families. It's like, "Well, I got to do this and then I got to do this, and then I took on this, and now I haven't been to church in I don't know how long."

I ran into a neighbor last night. She was walking her dog and I said, "How are you doing?" She said, "I haven't been to church in two months. I'm so sorry." I go, "Man, I just wanted to know how you were doing. How's your dog for crying out loud?" It's just like it's okay, it's really okay, but you feel the loss. You live with "What did I say? What did I do? Could I have done something different? I hope they're not lost to the kingdom. I hope they're just not in the congregation anymore." That weighs on you.

A pastor always is, as many of you are ... If you're in a position of public responsibility, people will try to use your position in order to accomplish their agenda. That should be no secret. It's all the way from, "Pastor, do you know what my sister ... This person is in your congregation." I get these calls all the time. "I know a person coming to your congregation. Do you know what they're doing?" This is called sick the pastor. If I can't get any results, I'll sick the pastor on them, because the pastor will get me results. You're always facing the sick the pastor cycle. Everybody from a person with a grievance to a person with a political agenda to a multilevel marketing person, all of them have a job for you to do. Somehow you've got to figure out how you don't need to do the job without offending or telling the person that they're concerns are not valid. That's just another pressure.

Let me give you two big ones. Then we'll get to the solutions. How much time I got left? Ten minutes, perfect. These are the two main reasons that people leave the pastorate. These are the two heaviest responsibilities and what your pastor is very probably dealing with, because all pastors deal with this. First of all, there will always be people in the congregation who disagree with what the pastor is doing or what the pastor is teaching or what the pastor said. That's of course. If you can't deal with that, don't go outside your house for crying out loud, because that's life. You just got to learn that there will be people who disagree. That's okay, but in every congregation there is one or two that take on the mantle and the agenda of tearing the pastor down to everybody they're around and becoming contrarians, becoming contrarians. No matter what you do, you can't get enough of a truce to not hear that voice popping up in other's voices all over the congregation. That is the number one reason pastors leave the pastorate, because they can't get away from that voice who will not just let it rest. Number one reason.

Now this stat will blow you away. This is from Barna. 40% of the pastors have considered leaving their church in the last three months. Now, let me say that again. In the last three months, 40% of your pastors have considered leaving the pastorate. That's the level of conflict and personal ambivalence and discouragement that they live with. That's why what I'm about to tell you is so important. Let me tell you one more thing. A lot of your pastors are really tired. When you get a phone call, there's just been a

car accident. You're ready to go to the beach with your family and you get a phone call, there's just been a car accident, and you know that family, you know where you're going. When you get a phone call or a note or anything that is ... You're always on call. You get a note on anything, that's what you do.

When you say, "Well, this is my day off." You better be in another country on your day off. You better not be able to come home, because it doesn't work like that. That goes on year after year after year. There's a level of weariness that people just aren't prepared for. 50% of the ministers starting out will not last five years. 50% of the ministers starting out will not last five years. I want you to know, when you're talking to somebody, you're talking to somebody who is tired. They're tired because they love. See, you don't get tired if you go, "Pft, well you know what happens there, buddy."

My youngest son is a doctor and there are certain doctors that because of the kind of medicine they do, they've grown callous over the years. There's a certain percentage of operations that are going to go bad. There's a certain percentage of patients that are going to be lost, and they just go, "Well that's just somebody in that percentage." There are doctors who feel the loss of every patient, who feel the unforeseen thing that went wrong in a procedure. They feel it as much as a family member does. Pastors are like that, I mean good pastors. They're going to be tired.

Let me get to the ... How much time I got left? Five minutes, perfect. It's all perfect. Four things I want to ask you to do for your pastor. First of all I want you to **pray for your pastor**. You knew I was going to say that. Just you knowing I was going to say that, please don't discount the importance of this. Many of you know the unbearable times that Becky and I have gone through with our family, and the pain and the devastation. I want to tell you, the only way we got through that, the only way we're standing on our feet today is the prayers that people prayed for us. We're convinced of that.

I can remember sitting at the table with my wife and tears just streaming down her face. She looked at me and she said, "Somebody is praying for us right now. I can feel it." There's a sense of peace that passes all understanding when somebody is praying for you. There's something that happens in your spirit that can't happen with a counselor, it can't happen even with scripture. There's something that happens in prayer that can't happen any other way. Pray for your pastor.

The second thing is **speak a good word for your pastor**. Let them know that you're there to protect them. Let me put this in context though. Don't go to your pastor and say, "Boy, I was with a group the other day just ripping you to shreds, but I spoke up for you pastor." You can leave that first part out. It would be better if you didn't say that part. Let your pastor know, "I'm for you and I appreciate you." Be specific about what you appreciate. The whole general, "Yeah, you're doing a great job", that's better to hear than you're not, but it really doesn't mean anything. Guys, you know if you ... I'm getting a little off subject here, but if you just say to your wife every once in a while, "You're great." Well, that doesn't really give her enough to go on. She'll want to know "Why did you say that? What did you mean? In what areas? Can you give me some examples?" Compliments without examples really only carry so much positivity. I'm not even sure that's a word. Be specific when you are speaking a good word for your pastor.

By the way, I did two in one there. The first one is pray. The second was protect. The third one is **encourage**. I meant to be specific when I was talking about encouragement. The fourth one is **give to your church**. Attend. Volunteer. See, this one actually requires something of you. I'm telling you, this is important because trend lines in churches, this is America, Jack, and if the trend lines are going downward, pastors in jeopardy. I speak from experience. I want you to know that it's important. An

important way to support your leadership, and this isn't just the pastors, this is the elders, this is the Sunday school teachers, this is the deacons, these are all the people that are leading your church, is to be a part of the productive portion of that congregation. The people who give, the people who attend, the people who volunteer, there's probably no more substantive way that you can support your pastor, other than prayer because told you prayer is bottom line, than that.

Okay, let's take some time around the tables. You've got the questions there. Discuss together how you can be improved in your approach to your pastor. Go ahead.

Lord, thanks for this time together. We love you and we love those that you have given us to bring us closer to you. Help us to be their ministers. Help us to be their encouragers. Help us to walk more like Jesus, which should be their main encouragement. We pray this in his name, Amen. Thanks, y'all for coming.