

# 8 Ways to Encourage Your Pastor



Sometimes pastors are the loneliest people in the church. Often their hours are long, the pay minimal, the criticism considerable and constant. Feelings of disappointment, discouragement, and defeat may begin to plague the best of them. Paul's admonition to "serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13 ) should encourage us to remember our shepherds.

Here are eight ways to make their lives better.

**1. Cut the criticism.** Presbyterian minister Fred Rogers, creator and host of television's "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood," recently gave an address describing the time he was a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and attended a different church each Sunday in order to hear a variety of preachers.

One Sunday he was treated to "the most poorly crafted sermon (he) had ever heard." But when he turned to the friend who had accompanied him, he found her in tears.

"It was exactly what I needed to hear," she told Rogers.

"That's when I realized," he told his audience," that the space between someone doing the best he or she can and someone in need is holy ground. The Holy Spirit had transformed that feeble sermon for her--and as it turned out, for me too."

Unlike most workers who are evaluated once or twice a year, clergy are often critiqued weekly after each worship service. It's not unusual to hear people say "the music was poor," "the hymn selection was awful," or "the sermon was boring." We would do well to remember that most spiritual leaders work hard to make worship a unique celebration each week.

**2. Pray regularly.** Ask God to shower your pastor with an abundance of love, hope, joy, faith, peace, power, wisdom, and courage. Pray for your spiritual leader's maturity and growth in the faith. As you pray keep in mind this wisdom from German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "If you treat a person as he is, he will stay as he is; but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be, he will become what he ought to be and could be."

**3. Express appreciation in writing.** A spoken compliment is always welcome, but a written one can be read over and over again for years. So, when you hear or see something you like from your minister, write an appreciative note.

**4. Use your skills to bless.** Are you proficient with computers? Help your pastor master the church's new computer. Are you a mechanic? Offer to service the car free of charge or at a reduced fee.

One pastor I know recalls: "I was pasturing my first church -- a small congregation with limited resources. While there, I developed a series of dental problems and could not afford treatment. What a joy it was when a dentist in the church offered to treat me for free. Correcting my dental problem involved nearly a dozen visits. He treated me carefully and cheerfully each time. I have thought of that dentist many times since then and the memories of his kindness continue to bless my life."

**5. Squelch gossip.** If you hear a negative comment, respond with a positive one. If misinformation is being spread, correct it with the accurate information. Or, if people are gossiping, just walk away. Remember the Bible soundly condemns gossip and careless speech. James 1:26 says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." And Psalm 34:13 reads, "Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies."

**6. Offer to meet a need.** Some people make their spiritual leaders defensive and angry by saying, "You need to \_" That approach is seldom welcome and almost always counterproductive. If you see a need, approach your spiritual leader by saying, "I'd like to help by \_" If you see an area that can be improved, take responsibility for working on it.

Be an active participant in your church. Get involved by teaching a class, leading a workshop, singing in the choir, feeding the hungry. Ask your spiritual leader where and how you can employ your gifts.

**7. Be openly responsive.** Nothing so animates and excites a spiritual leader as seeing people respond to the preaching and teaching. Imagine the surprise and delight of a pastor in Virginia Beach, Virginia, who, when greeting a visitor to his church, found she came because of the kindness of a church member who was her neighbor.

"I'm recently divorced, a single parent and new to this community," she told the pastor. "To keep up with rent and provide for my three children, I must work two jobs. That leaves me very little time for yard work. I was relieved when the weeds didn't overrun my yard as I had feared they might. However, when I made an unscheduled trip home in the middle of my workday, I discovered the reason why the weeds had not taken over my yard.

"My 86-year-old neighbor -- a member of your church -- was on his hands and knees pulling my weeds. I barely knew this man and he was embarrassed to be caught in this anonymous act of kindness. He explained that he heard you preach a sermon on the importance of living a life of compassion and kindness and decided to put that sermon into practice by weeding my lawn."

One pastor's heart filled with joy when a group of women in Washington, D.C., responded to a sermon preached from the words of Jesus--"Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). After hearing the sermon, the women decided to give a baby shower for the young woman who provided childcare while they met for Bible study. She was unmarried, close to going on welfare, and without support from her family or the father-to-be. The young woman was moved to tears by the surprise baby shower.

Later, the women explained to the pastor, "Your sermon taught us that it's possible to reach out to someone in need -- in this case, an unwed mother -- without judging or condoning the situation."

**8. Throw away the measuring stick.** Don't expect that your present spiritual leaders will do things the same way their predecessors did. Lay aside personal agendas and preferences. Instead, focus on how your leader is being used by God to do effective ministry now. By serving your shepherds, you will ensure that they will not only be encouraged but will feel appreciated and continue to minister with enthusiasm and energy.

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