

Pray for Rest

Series: How to Pray for Your Pastor

Matthew 11:28-30

Introduction

- Thank you for your prayers last week ... I had a great time at the Justice Conference for Asia in Hong Kong :)

- I told the staff earlier this week that I LOVE speaking at justice events :)
- It felt SO GOOD to be surrounded by hundred of people who have the same heart for these issues that we've been fighting for for the past few years :)

- But you know, even though I was scheduled to speak in HK all day Friday and Saturday ... I briefly thought about trying to squeeze everything and possibly make it back just in time for OEM on Sunday ...

- So last week before I left ... I was busy EACH DAY trying to get the conference messages and seminars finished ... finish up my classes at Torch ... AND ...
- I was busy trying to FINISH THIS SERMON FOR LAST WEEK TOO ...

- So here I am ... frantically trying to work MORE in a shorter amount of time ... (while working on this message on REST!) :P

- So I had to say: "Hold on ..." ... let's try LIVING it before preaching it! :)

- So I had to say (NOT SING) let it go ...

- And this is one example of why we need to PRAY FOR REST for our pastors :)

- We're in a new series that we started a few weeks ago on "How to Pray for Your Pastors"
- Pastors are on the front lines spiritually and we are in need of your prayers.

- The first week, we looked at WHY pastors need intercessory prayers ... and the first key prayer topic was to PRAY FOR PROTECTION.

- We need prayers to protect us and shield us from the many attacks from the outside ... and temptations from the inside ...

- And the second key prayer request is to **PRAY FOR REST (REPEAT)** ... and that's what we'll focus on today.

- Follow along with me in your outlines ... and let's learn how to pray more effectively in this way.

The first way we need to pray for rest concerning pastors is to ...

Pray for physical rest

- Physical rest and physical care are probably two of the most neglected things in a pastor's life.

- And in Psalm 23 we see our Great Shepherd's concern for this area of physical rest.

Psalm 23:1 ESV The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [2] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

- I love verse 2! :) It says: "He **MAKES ME** lie down in green pastures" ...

- So many of us get so busy and so active ... that He needs to "make" us lie down and stop!
 - In his classic book "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23", Phillip Keller says that for sheep, it is almost impossible to make them lie down unless 4 requirements are met:
 - 1. Because they are so timid, they will refuse to lie down unless they are free from all fear ...

- 2. Because of their social behavior ... they will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind ...
- 3. If bothered by flies or parasites, they will not lie down unless they are free from pests ...
- 4. They will not lie down unless they are free from hunger

- And so the shepherd plays a significant role in making this happen for the sheep.

- They need to be FREE from anxieties and fears ... to truly REST ...
- So we need pray that Jesus, our True Shepherd, would meet the basic needs and the deepest needs for our pastors.
 - But sadly, for far too many pastors, it's not until a break down happens that they finally take a break! :P
 - (e.g.) A few years ago, the New York Times and Leadership Resources released a study on pastoral burnout and found that:
 - 40% of pastors and 47% of their spouses experienced burn out from the ministry ... due to stress, conflict, and unrealistic expectations ...
 - 80% of pastors and 84% of their spouses feel discouraged ... and ineffective in ministry ...
 - 90% feel ill-prepared for the tasks at hand :(

<http://www.pastorburnout.com/pastor-burnout-statistics.html>

<http://www.leadershipresources.org/blog/christian-ministry-burnout-prevention-signs-statistics-recovery/>

- You see, there is a very close connection to our PHYSICAL condition and our SPIRITUAL condition.

- So praying for PHYSICAL REST is an important part of praying for the well-being of your pastor.

- This physical well being ... which some also call “self-care” is too often neglected, but desperately needed today.
- Peter Brain defines self-care as: “the wisdom to ensure, as far as humanly possible, a wise and orderly work that conserves and lengthens a pastor’s ministry.” (Burns Resilient Ministry p. 60)
- It would include things like:
 - Going to bed on time
 - a good sabbath, sabbatical, vacation and days off ...
 - exercise ...
 - And even maintaining a nutritious diet ... (Burns)
- And Dave Gibbons says: It’s about burning on, not burning out. I don’t know if many of us can finish well unless there’s some type of rhythm of rest and restoration and relationship in our lives. (Burns, p. 61)
- We must not neglect the physical part of our well-being as if that wasn’t important.
 - One survey found 76% of clergy were either overweight or obese, compared to 61% of the general population.

This shows the need for pastors to truly take a Sabbath ... as God intended on a regular basis.

Exodus 20:8 ESV “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

- A break from work is a proper rhythm cycle that God created us for ... [Work 6 / Rest 1]

- God made us to be a people who are wired for sabbath rest.

- Sabbath comes from the root work which simply means: “to quit, to stop, or to cease from doing something” ...
 - But it’s more than just a “day off” ... you see, there is a difference between a day off of work (where you’re busy running errands) and a true Sabbath.
 - For most ministers, they work 7 days a week ... which is the preparation grounds for eventual burn out.
 - For a small number, it is because of their inclination towards a workaholic tendency (which I confess I struggle with still) ...
 - But many pastors work every day simply due to the PRESSURE they feel from church members ... and the GUILT of not working ... or the FEAR of not meeting the standards they feel they must reach.

- There is the common joke of the little boy who came to shake the pastors hand after church service when he said: My Dad said he wishes he had your job? (Oh yeah? Why is that? Because you only work one day out of the week)
 - That’s what many people may THINK ... but the reality is far different.
 - (e.g.) With most pastors working 50-80 hours a week ... (but mentally and emotionally on call 24/7) ... it’s crucial to STOP, SABBATH, AND REST.

- We are created by God in such a way where ALL creation is meant to have the rhythm of WORK and REST ... WORSHIP ... and RESTORATION.

- So pray for physical rest for your pastors ...

But also ...

Pray for emotional rest

Matthew 11:28 ESV Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

- Jesus invites ALL who are burdened and weary to come to Him ...

- Because it is in Jesus we find true rest.
- In verse 29 He says learn to let Jesus carry your burdens (and share in the yoke) ... He is gentle ... and you will find REST ... for your souls!

And in Psalm 23, it says:

Psalm 23:3a ESV He restores my soul.

- It is in the presence of Jesus that true REST and RESTORATION happens.

- Because one of the most important lessons we learn in keeping Sabbath is leaning to trust that God is God ... and we are not ...

- Pete Scazzero, author of *The Emotionally Healthy Church* and *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* says: “At the heart of Sabbath is stopping to surrender to God in trust ... We imitate God by stopping our work and resting ... I give up control and trust God to run His world without me.” (Resilient Ministry, p. 53)
- Our flesh by nature is inclined to RELY on SELF and to be in control ... but the heart of faith stays centered on trusting that as long as God is in control ... I don't need to be.
 - And that is one of the biggest challenges for all us ... even pastors ... learning to give up control as we trust in God's control over all things.

Psalm 23:3a ESV He restores my soul.

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER?

BECAUSE REST IS NOT ALWAYS AN EASY THING FOR PASTORS TO DO ... BECAUSE THEY WILL OFTEN FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING :)

- (e.g.) Like when you're hosting a party ... you're often not fully relaxed ... because you want to make sure there's enough food ... drinks ... people are entertained ...
- But after everyone has GONE ... THEN you can relax ...
- Pastors are similar ... there is a constant feeling of responsibility ... that is hard to let go

(e.g.) I shared a little bit about my burn out years ago when I first came to OEM ... but those years were some of the most challenging and life-changing for my life.

- I was a workaholic who loved ministry ...

- I started a new ministry in Sydney ... (and starting a new ministry takes a lot of energy)
- I did all the teaching of courses, all the preaching, all the leadership training ...
- And in the VERY beginning I did all the praise leading too!
- I led all the mission training (even leading multiple mission trips within the same year) ...
 - Training multiple mission teams at the same time ...
- On top of that, I was working on my doctorate degree ...
 - Reading several books a week ...
 - Working on my dissertation ...

- BUT the thing that started burning me out (more than my work load), was the criticism, struggles, and lack of support I would get from some of the leaders on the Korean side
 - Having to fight for the smallest things ...
 - THAT was making me weary ...

But also, the emotional pain of betrayal was one of the hardest things to swallow for me.

(e.g.) You see, feeling fully supported gives me strength ... my phrase “Let’s do this” encapsulates joy in my journey ... to have a partner to do life and ministry together with ...

- But for my burn out ... I still CLEARLY remember the EXACT moment I broke down emotionally
- Up until then I was still able to run FULL speed ahead ...
- In the midst of my heavy work load ... I was still OK ...
- Then someone came and said: I’m here for you ... to support you ... and partner with you.
- But for several months not much was really happening in terms of support
- I asked this person to lead one of the mission teams ... but in the middle of training ... he said to me: I don’t feel like going on missions this year ... (he played golf instead)
 - So in the middle of prep ... I realizing I’d have to prepare and lead 2 ... something broke inside of me ...
 - I LITERALLY FELT SOMETHING BREAK INSIDE OF ME EMOTIONALLY
 - I still remember the EXACT moment ...

- I was carrying ... carrying ... carrying ... the weight of the ministry on my own shoulders ...
(TOO LONG AND IT BECOMES BURDENSOME)

- And you know what? I'd say many pastors feel like that right now.

- You see ... you can choose to not show up today ... (but the pastor can't)
- You can leave for another church from next week ... but not the pastors ...
 - WHY? Because they feel responsible for the ministry

- So one of the best ways to ENCOURAGE and STRENGTHEN your pastor emotionally is to PRAY (YES) ... but also to SHOW UP ... SERVE ... and SUPPORT the ministry!

- Showing up to events that we invest a lot of THOUGHT, prayer, time, money, energy into ... that encourages ...
- Serving in ministries ... that's encouraging for the pastor ...
- Supporting the ministry ... will strengthen your pastors ...

- But the emotional hit that happens to the heart through criticism ... conflict ... and even apathy from others ... can deplete pastors of the emotional strength to keep going.

- One pastor who was interviewed on this topic of burnout said: "It was hard to keep fighting (week in week out) for people who don't seem to care about you. I know that it's not the case for everyone ... but the ones who took the effort to communicate to me were the one's who were most dissatisfied with me and the church.
- I just couldn't go on anymore ...
- So I left the ministry.

- (e.g.) This quote reminded me of why we did the Voice of Love Campaign for adoption a few years ago.
 - There is a small but very LOUD anti-adoption group in Korea ...
 - And till now, the government has been changing laws because of their voice was the only one being heard ...
 - Because ... if you had a good adoption, a good life ... you won't go out of your way to contact the government and say: "I really like my life"
 - But the ones who DID have a hard life ... even an abusive one ... WILL make the effort to say: my life stinks ... adoption wasn't for me!"
 - And though they were a small percentage, they were the loud percentage.

- THAT'S WHY we did the Voice of Love campaign ...

- We gathered video testimonies of adoptees and families who were BLESSED by adoption and wanted to let THEIR voice be heard!
- So we compiled them and shared them with the government ... and a year afterwards, we were able to see positive laws changed in favor of adoption ...

- I share this story because what happens in the church is also very similar.

- The NEGATIVE voices are smaller in number ... but usually the LOUDEST and often MAKE THE EFFORT TO COMMUNICATE THEIR DISPLEASURE to the pastor.
- Those who are content ... or even happy ... oftentimes will not make the effort to communicate things ... because things are fine :)

- That's FINE ... except what ends up happening many times ... is that the negative voices are the main voices pastors end up hearing ... (time and time again) ...

- So in light of that, I'm not surprised that 1500 pastors leave the ministry each month.

- It's been said that pastors think about quitting at least once a week ... and it's usually on Mondays :)

- So I share these things to ask you to PRAY for the emotional strength, rest, and encouragement for your pastors.
- That though they face critics and even enemies ... the presence of Jesus would be their rest!

Psalm 23: 4 ESV Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. [5] You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

And a third way to pray is to ...

Pray for spiritual rest

Psalm 116:7 ESV Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

- He is commanding his SOUL ... to GO BACK to your TRUE place of rest ...

- Go back and REST ... before the Lord!
- WHY? Because God is GOOD ... and He is GRACIOUS to you!
 - REST in His goodness ... rest in His grace ...
 - Because of His character ... because of His sovereignty and control ... we can be at rest before Him!

*Psalm 62:1 NIV **My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. [2] He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.***

THIS IS A CRUCIAL TRUTH THAT WE MUST NEVER FORGET ... OUR SOUL FINDS REST ... IN GOD ... ALONE!

- My soul finds rest ... in God alone. (**REPEAT**) :)

- For some, the biggest challenge of a spiritual shepherd ... is to REST in the True Shepherd of our souls, Jesus Christ.

- THEREFORE: pray that we would be able to drink deeply from the Water of Life ... and find our DAILY refreshment in Him.

- Pray that pastors too would be able to rest in our identity in Christ
 - That our IDENTITY ... and SECURITY ... would be found in Him ...
 - And NOT in the titles ... demands ... expectations ... approval ... of others
 - So that even IF the titles are GONE ... and people are GONE ... the applause is GONE ... our JOY will still remain ... because our JOY is found in the Lord!

- You see ... even pastors need to be reminded of the gospel over and over again!

- That Jesus came to give TRUE REST ... and that comes through RESTING in His Work!
 - We always need to remember what TRUE FAITH REALLY IS:
 - It is resting in the RISEN savior to make us right ... and righteous

- Because even pastors will get caught up thinking that sometimes OUR WORK ... and our ministry is what keeps us in a right relationship with God ...

- So PRAY for spiritual rest ... that relies fully on the work of Christ.

Conclusion

- Burnout and lack of rest is one of the top factors that eliminate pastors from ministry.

- Burnout is HIGH in pastors ... because unlike other addictions ... workaholism is often ADMIRERD, encouraged ... and even rewarded.

- The Journal of Clinical Psychology states that pastors have the HIGHEST overall work-related stress ... AND are almost at the LOWEST in terms of having the personal resources to cope with the strain! (Resilient Ministry, p. 77)

- And the LONGER you continue without proper BREAKS ... the LONGER IT WILL TAKE TO RECOVER when you finally DO try and take a break!

- One of the things I've found out about myself is that it takes a long time to unwind and relax from work ... (meaning: it takes awhile to really let go of everything)

- (e.g.) I can go on a vacation ... but I can't wind down until after 2 weeks ... (usually)

- At the end of my 2 weeks is when I begin to feel relaxed!

- It is not an easy thing for a pastor to rest! :P

(e.g.) I did a random search online and stumbled upon a website dedicated to pastoral burn out. (pastorburnout.com) [Yes, it's real]

- There's a section on the website for pastors to share their burn out stories ... and it was breaking my heart to read so many who feel so tired ... and weary from serving the body of Christ.

- If you have time or are interested to read ... please pray for some of these guys ... heart breaking

(e.g.) Pastor initialed C.E. wrote:

Its not fun anymore

I started out pastoring with all the zeal and energy of a 5 year old on a playground, but now after over 20 years in the ministry, I honestly dread it. I used to love Sundays now I can't wait for them to be over. The problem is they keep coming around:). The crazy thing is, the current ministry I now over see was almost completely dead when I got here and today it is doing really well. You would think I would be thrilled but I'm miserable. I've read the Bible, prayed, read books and even gone to see the doctor, but still I spend my days dreaming about leaving and doing something else. Of course it's complicated: with my kids, my wife, and our community, but I'm fed up with being a pastor. I can't remember what it feels like to be a normal person. I know I've got it good, and I know God loves me, but I'm wore out and feel guilty to be so. I know you don't know me, but I would appreciate your prayers.

(e.g.) Another pastor from the Southwest part of America wrote:

I no longer have energy or excitement for this work. I sort of 'mail it in' ... recycling old sermons (I haven't been able to write for several years) ... going through the motions. God's people should have more than that! I just don't want to do this any more ... and that makes me feel very guilty. People still encourage me in my work. They love my sermons and Bible studies. But I feel like a fake.

(e.g.) Pastor Gary from Ohio:

I'm struggling to hang on with an aging congregation with vision-less leaders, a place where fear rules everything. I've looked around for other churches but, at fifty-seven, I don't exactly jump to the short list of candidates.

I'm tired, just plain tired. I don't sleep well. I struggle with depression and anxiety. I feel my love growing cold. Like many of you, I want to leave the ministry but I don't know where to go or what to do.

(e.g.) And another pastor wrote of how he even took 2 bottles of sleeping pills hoping he would never wake up again (!)

(e.g.) Another pastor wrote:

I feel stuck with no money, no hope, no future and I feel such a fake preaching about a God who gave us hope and a future.

I am going to a conference soon about recharging the pastors... (I feel such a hypocrite...I am the one needing the re-charging not them...)

I need a long sabbatical.

Maybe a long sleep would be better.

Resting in peace would be the best. ***[An alarming number of suicides have increased this year!]***

(e.g.) But I'll add in one on a lighter note :)

After a church service a little boy told the pastor, "When I grow up, I'm going to give you some money." "Well, thank you," the pastor replied, "but why?" "Because my daddy says you're one of the poorest preachers we've ever had."

- There are great burdens placed on pastors ... and one of the most important prayers you can pray for them ... is that they will be able to give THEIR burdens ... into the hands of Jesus ...

- May the pastors in your life also be able to CAST all THEIR CARES on Jesus ... because they KNOW ... He cares for them.

- Pastors need your prayers ... because your prayer support ... is their life support.

- Pray for their rest ... today :)

Let's pray ...