

53 Ways to Love Your Pastor (... and His Family)

By Sandy Hewitt

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, pastors do work more than one day a week! In fact, shepherding a flock can be quite an unpredictable all-consuming experience, in both time and emotion, for the average pastor. Just when he believes that he's "heard it all" and that nothing could possibly shock him, someone knocks on his door and shares their emotional and gut wrenching story. As a pastor, due to the nature of the position, one has little protection from both the physical and mental exhaustion which is an ever present threat to his creativity, productivity and longevity in the pulpit.

Several years ago, when my husband was trying to secure disability insurance, he was told that pastors had the highest rate of disability claims due to mental stress. Another statistic by Focus on The Family stated that 84 percent of pastors live in a constant state of discouragement. These insights would suggest that many pastors are falling between the cracks, in some cases leaving the ministry altogether, feeling alone and unsupported in this thing called "ministry."

Life is busy! People have so many places to be and things to think about. The pastor gets paid to do what he does. It's his job! While all of that is true, it is also true that all of us need encouragement along the way. Encouragement for anyone is like gas for an engine. It empowers! Pastors are called on to take the weight of their entire congregation on their shoulders. Although there is great joy in being obedient to God's calling to ministry, it can also be a heavy load at times as they bear the burdens of so many. As my husband put it, "You give each of them a piece of your heart."

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are called on to edify one another, to build each other up. Part of "building each other up" would include being observant in knowing **when, where and how** to best accomplish that task. Deciding exactly WHAT to do for your pastor can be overwhelming and time consuming.

The following pages suggest 53 ways to love your pastor. Some suggestions are simple. Others are more involved. I would encourage you to take these suggestions and make them your own. Have fun! Personalize them to fit your pastor. Or, change them completely. Most importantly, DO SOMETHING! If you're not careful, you might be encouraged yourself!

Know Your Pastor

In Gary Chapman's book The Five Love Languages,¹ he encourages spouses to get to know their husbands and wives, to learn what makes them "feel" loved. He suggests that different things make different people feel loved. (i.e. Quality Time, Gifts, Acts of Service, Words of Affirmation, Physical Touch) Dr. Chapman's supposition is that a person feels most loved when the act of love shown is in the category which is most meaningful to them personally.

For instance, you've undoubtedly heard stories of children saying they grew up not feeling loved by their fathers. Many times the fathers have responded that they worked 60 hours a week to provide a nice home, good food and beautiful clothes for them. How could their child not feel loved? Very simply, if a child's love language is Quality Time, then Dad has missed the boat entirely! Indeed, that child would have rather had a smaller house, cheaper tennis shoes etc. and had Dad around to spend time with. Then, they would have felt more loved.

The truth is, this premise may be, and I believe should be, applied to any relationship, whether it's your spouse, child, boss, friend or your pastor and his family. I encourage you to get to know your pastor. Find out what makes him tick. Find out what makes him feel truly loved and appreciated. One clue would be to watch how he shows love. People often show love in the manner in which they like to receive it.

¹ Gary Chapman, The Five Love Languages: the secret to love that lasts (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1992)

There are several ways to get to know your pastor and his spouse*:

1. Have them over to a relaxed, simple dinner. Use the opportunity to get to really know them and what makes them tick. Play a simple game to lighten things up.
2. Make a short questionnaire and ask him and his spouse each to fill one out. (special dates, favorite foods, activities, books, sports teams etc.)
3. Ask those that know them the best what types of things make them (pastor and spouse) feel loved the most.
4. Pay attention! If you really listen during sermons and conversations, you'll pick up ideas and valuable information.

I would encourage you to approach this investigation scientifically. Take notes. Keep a record of what you do. Although I would encourage you to use discretion and not make them feel uncomfortable, there is nothing wrong with being deliberate. Do the work up front. Then, as you have the desire and opportunity to show your Pastor and/or his spouse love and encouragement, you'll know exactly what to do!

****Few things will make a pastor feel more encouraged than to see others loving on his wife!***

Quality Time

If your Pastor and/or his wife feel most loved and appreciated when people take the opportunity to spend **quality time** with them, you might want to consider the following methods of encouragement:

1. Random lunch/dinner invitations*

- A. Pastor & Male church member
- B. Wife & Female church member
- C. Couple to Couple
- D. Family to Family

**Restaurants are a great alternative; but, don't underestimate the impact of hosting the lunch or dinner in your home. It doesn't have to be complicated. Keeping it simple will encourage you to do it more frequently!*

2. Do a fun activity together as two couples.

- A. Daytime activity based on his/her hobbies, likes etc.
- B. Overnight get away to a beach or a state or national park
- C. Take them to a concert and dinner
- D. If they like sports, take them to a game from a locally based team.

3. Arrange for your Pastor and his wife to spend some quality time together.

- A. Give him an extra day off which precedes or follows his regular day off.
- B. Give him a plan and even some cash to make sure money doesn't hinder.

- C. If you know someone who has a cabin in the woods or on a lake, or a condo on the beach, see if you could arrange something. Do you know someone with a time share that they don't use regularly?
 - D. Offer child care as needed.
- 4. Invite the entire family to your house for a simple dinner and games.**
- A. Make it relaxed...resist the temptation to talk "church business."
 - B. Reduce the stress on everyone by making the food simple.
 - C. Don't stress out about your house; yet, shoot for clean and comfortable.
 - D. Find out ahead of time what kind of games they do or don't enjoy.
- 5. Board of Deacons or Elders and their wives plan a Surprise Day**
- A. Plan a day from Breakfast through dinner where you all travel together.
 - B. Appoint a "chauffer" to pick them up first thing in the morning.
 - C. Tell them how to dress.
 - D. Plan a main goal or event somewhere along the way.
 - E. You might want to purchase gift cards ahead of time to present at each location to give them a feeling of independence as well as a budget!

Gifts

If **receiving gifts** is something that truly makes your pastor feel loved and appreciated, you might want to consider the following:

- 1. Find out what hobbies your pastor might have and try to purchase something that will assist him in pursuing that hobby.**
 - A. golf balls
 - B. fishing license
 - C. tickets to a play, concert or sporting event
 - D. gift card or money to a restaurant
(maybe on a regular basis?)
 - E. gift card or money to a specific store with a note of direction (i.e. bookstore, Kohls etc.)

- 2. Give any monetary Christmas Gift a few weeks early in order that he might be able to use it to buy gifts for his children and wife.**

- 3. Play/lodging combination.** (in town or out of town)
 - A. Mystery dinners would count as a play!
 - B. Be sure to offer child care as needed

- 4. Acknowledge special days**
 - A. Birthdays
 - B. Anniversaries

5. **Small Gifts along the way** (for no special reason)
 - A. An inexpensive bouquet of flowers (for his wife)
 - B. His favorite Candy
 - C. His favorite dessert (Homemade is an extra plus and always appreciated!)
 - D. Gift card to Dairy Queen

6. **Gift Card to a Grocery Store**
 - A. Choosing a store that has more than food is always a great idea...gives more flexibility in shopping! (i.e. Wal-Mart, Meijer etc.)
 - B. Better yet, find out where they do their grocery shopping!

7. **Make a payment on his school loans, or pay them off completely!**
 - A. Especially for a young pastor, school loans can keep them from qualifying for mortgages, car loans etc.
 - B. You might consider starting a church-wide drive to help in this way.

8. **Give an annual membership** (individual or family) **to...**
 - A. Zoo
 - B. Gym
 - C. Museum

Acts of Service

Does your Pastor or his wife feel most loved and appreciated when someone performs an **Act of Service** for him? If so, go to a little extra trouble for him! You might want to consider the following:

1. Offer or arrange child care.

- A. Offer for one specific time for a few hours.
- B. Offer for several times over a longer time period.
 - 1.) Every Thursday evening for six months.
 - 2.) Friday over night once a month, for six months.

2. Mow his grass.

- A. You better ask on this one. Some people are very particular about their lawns. Be willing to take instruction and do it in a way that the end result truly feels like a blessing! ☺

3. Offer to help with any necessary house maintenance.

4. Rake his leaves in the fall. Don't ask, just do it while he is away from home.

5. In winter, shovel/snow blow his driveway. Don't ask. Just show up and start working!

6. Commit to perfect attendance for a quarter

- A. Try for a percentage of the whole church to make the same commitment for the 12 weeks!

7. Encourage your pastor by volunteering to help with a project that the church has voted to do. (unprompted and with enthusiasm)

- 8. Do an act of service/kindness for someone else in their name.** (Be sure to drop him a card to let him know.)
- 9. Service the pastor's car. Wash it, clean the inside and change the oil, maybe even the brakes!**
 - A. Call him & arrange to pick up the car.
 - B. Leave your car for him to drive!
 - C. If you're mechanical minded, with permission, just change the oil or brakes right there in his driveway at a pre-arranged time
- 10. Arrange for a random Sunday off. Don't tell him. Make it a Surprise!**
 - A. This would need to be done through the Church leadership, Deacons or Elders, to ensure adherence to proper church procedure.
 - B. Have a guest speaker arranged and just let the pastor sit and be ministered to. He can use his prepared sermon the next week, which will free up time.
 - C. Please exercise a measure of caution with this idea. Pastors sometimes have special timing in mind with certain messages. You may want to check with him or his secretary in this regard before proceeding with specific dates (after checking with church leadership).

Words of Affirmation

Does your pastor or his wife feel most loved and appreciated when people use **words to affirm** his ministry and character? If so, you might want to consider the following:

1. Arrange for a card shower.

- A. Don't let him know. Announce through the prayer chain, Sunday School classes, Deacon's calling list etc.
- B. You might choose a time that pastor and his wife are gone on vacation to announce it. The cards could be there waiting when they get home!

2. During October, Pastor Appreciation Month, arrange something special for each Sunday.

- A. Card shower
- B. Give he and/or his wife flowers
- C. Special dinner/banquet
- D. Arrange for a good size spot in the local paper honoring your pastor.
 - 1.) This will be expensive, but will also serve as advertising!
- E. Weekly testimonials prior to worship service regarding what pastor's ministry has meant to them personally.

3. Plan a "This is Your Life" banquet, maybe for a birthday or anniversary.

4. **Purpose in your heart to comment specifically on the pastor's message.**
 - A. Don't just say "great message pastor".
 - B. Tell him what you learned from it.
 - C. Tell him about a commitment you made as a result.
 - D. Thank him for preaching all of the Word and being careful with its exposition.
 - E. A text or email is a great way to do this, in addition to in-person.

5. **Send cards on a random basis.**
 - A. Thinking of You, Thank You, Praying For You etc.
 - B. Send funny as well as serious!

6. **Do a special presentation on a Sunday morning, "Reasons why we love our Pastor"** (Give people the opportunity ahead of time to write a note to this affect and have one person compile and read in a creative manner).

7. **Give him a memory book of pictures, notes memorabilia etc.**

Physical Touch

Does your pastor or his wife feel most encouraged when someone gives him a hug, a firm hand grasp or a meaningful touch on the shoulder? You might consider the following:

1. **A firm hand grasp with a meaningful touch on the shoulder as you share something positive.**
2. **Hugs are great for your pastor. BUT, be careful to be appropriate!**
 - A. Make sure it takes place in a public setting.
 - B. Side hugs are safer.
 - C. Don't overdo it! A well timed hug is great. Yet, hugs lasting too long or given too frequently may become uncomfortable.
 - D. Be **sensitive, observant** and **smart!**
3. **Eye contact is so important!** It's a kind of physical touch. Be sure to look your pastor in the eye (within reason☺) when you are talking to him.

Don't Forget!!!!

Your pastor and his family are actually one unit. If any part of that unit isn't functioning properly the entire family is affected. Don't forget to remember his wife and children!

Having been in full-time church ministry, nothing seemed to make my husband happier than to see people in our congregation loving on me or our children in one way or another. Those kind acts of love encouraged us to persevere during busy and sometimes difficult times.

Did you know that your pastor's children often feel like they are growing up in a fishbowl, with everything they do and say out there for all to see and hear? Did you know that they often give up planned family time as phone calls come in and hospital visits, meetings etc. are needed?

Don't get me wrong. There are also plenty of perks that come with the position of pastor's wife and child! It certainly isn't all bad! My point is simply that in encouraging your pastor, you need to be mindful of his entire family. Why not apply all of the same criteria listed in the preceding pages to each person in his family?

Last, but not least.....

PRAY for your pastor and let him know that you are praying for him. Send him a note or an e-mail.

Pray for: his spiritual condition
his family's spiritual condition
his purity
his safety
Wisdom

Ask him, occasionally, for specific prayer requests. Most of all, be consistent and follow through!