

An Invitation to Intercede
for Your Pastor and Revive Your Church

When the People Pray

A 30-DAY
JOURNEY

thom s. rainer

when the people pray

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When the People Pray: An Invitation to Intercede for Your Pastor and Revive Your Church

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To pastors, God's servants:

We care for you.

We love you.

We pray for you.

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A Brief Word to Church Members

YOU HAVE THIS BOOK IN YOUR HANDS FOR A REASON.

It is my prayer that this book and your decision to read it are a divine intersection. You see, if you really take this plan seriously and pray for your pastor for the next thirty days, you could see your church transformed.

I'm serious.

Your pastor has been called to lead your church spiritually. But your pastor is also up against a lot of battles, a multitude of expectations, and the constant nagging of doubts. Your pastor is in a spiritual battle. In fact, your pastor is being challenged daily by the enemy the Bible calls the devil.

Read the following verse carefully. Read it prayerfully:

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

I PETER 5:8

WHEN THE PEOPLE PRAY

This passage is applicable to all Christians, but it especially has meaning for pastors. If the enemy can distract, discourage, and disengage the pastors, the entire church suffers.

So what is *your* role? You are to “stay alert.” You are to encourage your pastor. You are to minister to your pastor. Even more, you are to pray for your pastor.

Do you realize the importance of what you can do in God’s power through prayer? As you pray for your pastor, you are not only praying for one person to be empowered; you are praying for an entire church to be empowered. As churches around the world are empowered, a revolution takes place in the heavenly realms. Indeed, a spiritual awakening could break out.

In many ways, my initial statement is an *understatement*. As you pray for your pastor, not only will you see your pastor and church transformed, but you could begin to see the *world* transformed.

The plan is simple and straightforward. Set aside thirty minutes per day for the next thirty days. Read and reflect on each day’s challenge in the pages that follow and *pray for your pastor*.

I’m not suggesting you stop praying for your pastor at the end of thirty days. Rather, I’m encouraging you to *start* praying for your pastor now and make it a regular practice in your life from here on. This book is a catalyst. A starting point. It is not the grand finale.

Imagine you are about to embark on a journey that will change the world. You don’t even need to imagine it. Just start praying daily and see what God will do—greater things than you can even “ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).

As you pray for your pastor, I hope many others in your church

A BRIEF WORD TO CHURCH MEMBERS

will join you. I pray that your church will assemble an army to fight in this spiritual warfare. It is my fervent prayer that church members around the world will begin praying for their pastors more than ever.

Thank you for your willingness to take on this marvelous task and challenge. Stick with it. Give it the full thirty days and see what God will do.

See what God will do for your pastor.

See what God will do for your church.

And, yes, see what God will do in your own life.

And now, let us pray.

A Brief Word to Pastors

PASTORS, MAY I TELL YOU A STORY?

Many years ago, I pastored a difficult church. It was my third pastorate, but I had never before experienced the types of challenges that confronted me every day in this church. These challenges were not uncommon to pastors—critics, misunderstandings and misrepresentations, power groups, and a severe case of apathy among the flock—but it was the first time I had encountered such difficulties.

To be clear, I shared in the blame. I often responded poorly. I had my own attitude problem. And I could have used an extra measure of humility. Still, the church was difficult, and I really struggled. Not only did I have days when I wondered if I should stay at the church, but I sometimes wondered whether I should stay in vocational ministry.

Have you been there? I think we've all been there.

One Sunday morning, I was especially discouraged. As I walked to the pulpit, I did not feel like preaching. But somehow, by the grace of God, I made it through my sermon. At the conclusion of the service, I made some extemporaneous statements that I later

wondered if I would regret. To the best of my memory, here is what I told the congregation:

Folks, though it could be a risk, I want to be vulnerable and transparent with you. I am struggling. I am struggling as your pastor. I even had difficulty preaching today. I don't need to share all the reasons for my struggles; I know, above all, it's a spiritual battle. But at the risk of being presumptuous, could I ask something of you? Even if only a few of you are willing, it could make a huge difference for me. Will you commit to pray for me every day? Even if it's just a couple of minutes, will you pray for my ministry and for me? I know it's a big request, but I need prayers more than ever. I'm sorry to burden you with my own situation, but I really do need help, God's help. Thank you for any help you can give me.

Within two days, more than one hundred members of the church told me they had committed to pray for me daily. I was told many more were also involved. One of the larger contingents said they had committed to pray for me for one minute at noon every day, wherever they were and whatever they were doing.

I wept at their response. I still get teary-eyed thinking about it today.

I was transformed. Our church was transformed.

The power of prayer was at work.

Why do I tell you this story? It's simple. Like many pastors, you may be reluctant to ask your church members for help—and especially to pray for you. After all, you're supposed to be the

strong spiritual leader in the church. Can you really afford to be that vulnerable?

Yes, you can. In fact, you can't afford *not* to be that vulnerable. You need to let go of any uncertainty or pride that hinders you from asking. You could be holding back something significant from taking place in your church. Yes, you could be hindering your own ministry.

After forty years of ministry, fellow pastor, I have learned a few things. I can be fiercely stubborn, too stubborn for my own good. But when I have asked and given permission for God's people to pray for me, I have seen many incredible things happen. I have seen miracles.

It's time. It's time for you to let go—of your fear, your pride, your reticence—and ask the members of your church to pray for you. Give them this book. Ask them to pray. See what God can do.

The apostle Paul asked for prayer. Why won't you?

Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:30

DAY 1

God

MOST CHURCH MEMBERS view pastors as people with a vibrant relationship with God. Indeed, it is true for most pastors most of the time.

But it is not true for all pastors all of the time.

Pastors have lapses.

Pastors can have misplaced priorities.

Pastors can get frustrated with all the demands placed on them.

Today is the first day of thirty that you will be praying for your pastor. Because it is the beginning, it is the most important day. It's also the most important day because you are praying for your pastor's relationship with God.

Every pastor who is transparent will tell you about struggles. Though it's a cliché to say that pastors are human, they really do wrestle with all the same issues you do. They get discouraged. They have doubts. They face temptation and succumb to sin.

WHEN THE PEOPLE PRAY

Though I encourage you to admire your pastor and have the utmost respect for your pastor, do not put him on a pedestal. Do not make him something he is not. If you do, you will see little need to pray for your pastor. If pastors had perfect strength and wisdom, they wouldn't need your prayers. But pastors are not perfect, and they do need your prayers.

Your pastor needs regular prayers for a firm and unwavering commitment and relationship with God. Your pastor is powerless unless that strength comes from God.

Stay on the path that the LORD your God has commanded you to follow. Then you will live long and prosperous lives in the land you are about to enter and occupy.

DEUTERONOMY 5:33

Reflection

The room was filled with pastors, probably fifty or more. They had come to learn how to lead their churches and reach their communities more effectively. They came to the conference with high expectations.

Of course, we don't know what was in the minds and hearts of all the pastors. But we know about some of them.

Early in the conference, one pastor said he was there because his church had been in a slow but steady decline for six years. He had tried everything to no avail. He was frustrated. At times, he was despondent. He admitted to everyone in the room that he'd even had moments where he questioned his calling and competency.

GOD

God used that pastor's level of transparency to encourage some of the other pastors to be more transparent and more vulnerable.

Two pastors admitted they had the same questions and concerns as the first pastor. One confessed that his life had become spiritually dry. He didn't know how he could lead his church if he was not growing spiritually himself.

The conference took a dramatic turn as the keynote speaker was about to present his message. God was clearly moving, and the speaker took the cue. He did not want to quench the work of the Spirit.

"Let's take a few minutes to pray before we get into today's content," he said to the gathered pastors. He opened the floor to anyone who wanted to voice a prayer.

Those "few minutes" turned into an hour. Pastors began praying for a restored relationship with God. Some confessed that their busyness had caused them to neglect their time with God. A few were sobbing quietly, unable to speak.

These pastors had come with their notebooks, expecting some practical guidance on leading their churches to growth. But the real issue was their need to grow in their own relationship with God.

Later, one of the pastors shared with the speaker what had happened with him during this time.

"I realized I could not begin to lead my church when I was running on empty myself," he admitted. "I had to let God deal with me and my relationship with him first. I know I'm not alone when I describe myself as a pastor who needs God."

Indeed, that pastor is not alone. Many pastors admit they have let the demands of church life and leadership impinge on their

relationship with God. Your pastor likely has these moments as well. As you take this journey for the next thirty days, you will discover the incredible expectations placed on pastors. You will also discover their struggles and challenges.

If you read the words closely, you will also discover that, more than anything else, pastors need a vibrant and deep relationship with God. They cannot lead unless they are first filled.

It's time for that filling to take place.

It's time we church members prayed for our pastors.

And the first item on our list is to pray for their ongoing relationship with God.

Praying for My Pastor

God, I pray first that my pastor would walk with you more closely and know you more deeply.

Sometimes I'm not aware of the demands placed on pastors. I do not fully grasp the scope and range of expectations coming from so many different church members. Pastors are often expected to be everywhere and to know everything.

I pray for my pastor to know when to slow down and spend time with you, Lord. Busyness cannot replace a relationship with you. Pastors cannot please everyone, but they must always strive to please you.

Help me to see the life of my pastor more clearly. Help me to understand his needs and struggles so I can pray more diligently. Teach me to have a heart of compassion, empathy, and awareness.

Above all, remind me to pray for my pastor to have a dynamic relationship with you. Pastors can't lead others until they are first led by you, God.

GOD

*Lord, please place my pastor in a posture to know you better.
Only then can my pastor be the leader of this church you have
molded and shaped.*

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*