



How to Encourage Your Pastor

A guide for Sunday School classes and church leaders

"Much of a pastor's work is unseen. Even those laypeople closest to their pastor often do not know the basic contours of his day beyond sermon preparation and some counseling."

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Most people want to encourage their pastor and have no idea what he actually carries, so the encouragement stays general. General encouragement is forgettable. Specific encouragement changes a man's week.

What his week actually holds

Sermon preparation is the part you can see. For a man committed to preaching the text, that alone runs fifteen to twenty hours. The rest is mostly invisible:

- Hospital rooms and funeral homes, often on short notice
- Marriages coming apart in his office, which he can never tell anyone about
- Wayward children, addiction, a diagnosis nobody else knows yet
- Budget shortfalls, building problems, personnel decisions
- Criticism he absorbs and does not pass on

He carries most of this alone, and he carries it home.

Things that cost nothing

- Be specific. "Good sermon" is a handshake. "What you said about Naomi three weeks ago has been working on me since" is a gift.
- Say to his face what you would say in the parking lot.
- Defend him when he is not in the room.
- Encourage without attaching a request. Let one conversation be only the kindness.
- Tell him you are praying for him, and what for.
- Thank the ministry assistant, the nursery workers, the sound booth.

Things that cost something

- Cover a night away for him and his wife, and handle the childcare, not just the money.
- Give something in a month that is not October. Appreciation on the calendar is expected. Appreciation in February is believed.
- Buy the book or the conference he mentioned and never bought.
- Take something off his plate that nobody thanks anyone for.
- Give him a real day off and protect it.

What to avoid

- The hallway ambush. "Great sermon, and by the way..." He will remember only the second half.
- Anonymous notes, even kind ones. Sign your name.
- One appreciation Sunday standing in for a year of ordinary kindness.
- Comparing him to a former pastor, even favorably.
- Gifts that create obligation.

Do not forget his family

His wife hears every criticism and almost none of the compliments. She sits in a pew and cannot say what she knows. Ask her how she is doing without making the question about him.

His children did not choose this. Let them be children in your church rather than examples.

THE ACTION STEP

A simple plan for your class or committee

- 1 Pick one week in October and put it on the calendar now.
- 2 Assign names. "Somebody should" is how these die.
- 3 Do one thing that costs something, not only cards.
- 4 Put one more thing on the calendar for February, when nobody is watching. That one will mean the most.