



*What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew*  
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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments . . . . .	9
Introduction . . . . .	11

## **SECTION 1: Your Pastor's Personal Life**

1. "I'm Not Superman" . . . . .	17
2. "My Spiritual Life Sometimes Suffers" . . . . .	33
3. "Ministry Has Taken a Toll on Me" . . . . .	43
4. "My Spouse and Children Need Your Grace and Love" . . . . .	51
5. "I Just Wish I Could Support My Family" . . . . .	61

## **SECTION 2: Your Pastor and the Church**

6. "This Bivocational Thing Isn't Easy" . . . . .	71
7. "If You Knew How Frustrating Ministry Can Be" . . . . .	79
8. "Sometimes I'm Overwhelmed with Anxiety" . . . . .	95
9. "You're Difficult Now and Then" . . . . .	109

## **SECTION 3: Your Pastor and the World Community**

10. "I Want Our Church to Be in the World, Not of It" . . . . .	123
11. "Preaching to You Is the Hardest Thing I Do" . . . . .	137
12. "I'm Concerned about Evangelism" . . . . .	147

## **CONCLUSION: Your Pastor's Calling**

13. "There's a Reason I'm Still Here" . . . . .	155
Notes . . . . .	167

# CHAPTER 1

## “I’M NOT SUPERMAN”

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

**1 Timothy 1:12**

**I THOUGHT I KNEW A** lot about pastors until I read the hundreds of anonymous surveys returned to me from church leaders across the country. These survey responses revealed pastors’ hearts—openly, candidly, and honestly. Of course, I expected to hear some of the concerns and frustrations confessed, but, I must tell you, some of these pastors surprised me—a few even shocked me.

Perhaps you, like most people, perceive the church pastor to be a strong, almost superhuman spiritual leader—a kind of Spiritual Superman—who has his life and faith and family together. You may believe Spiritual Superman has long ago worked through all his personal and professional problems, and now possesses few, if any, inadequacies, fears, disappointments, or unrealized expectations.

You listen with confidence to his sermons on Sunday mornings. You depend on him to spiritually educate your children. You call on him when you are troubled, depressed, or need advice. When you have a question, you expect him to have the right answer. When you have a crisis, you rush to him for help. When you undergo surgery, you know he’s praying for you in the hospital waiting room.

## 18 • WHAT PASTORS WISH CHURCH MEMBERS KNEW

But how often do you and I purposely look beyond the super spiritual image and see his heart? How often do we realize that he, too, is a vulnerable human being? And, like other human beings, he lives in an imperfect, fallen world and experiences hurts, temptations, struggles, and tragedies in his own life and family?

Throughout the following pages, you'll be able to look deep inside the hearts of today's church pastors to see their unfulfilled yearnings, self-doubts, personal and professional limitations, and human inadequacies. You'll also learn of pastors' fears, disappointments, frustrations, discouragements, and unrealized expectations. You'll see hurt and loneliness and sadness, but you'll also see love, concern, and genuine joy.

For a long time now, theologians, historians, denominational leaders, and others have been telling us the evangelical church in this country is facing a crisis. Church attendance is down; young adults are turned off to the previous generation's beliefs and practices; worship wars are destroying fellowship; secular media is influencing people to laugh at and reject evangelical belief and involvement. We've all heard the comments. We've all seen the throngs of people exiting the church's back door. The church's future can sometimes seem bleak—like a sinking ship already half submerged.

In his new book, *unChristian*, researcher David Kinnaman writes: "One of the surprising insights from our research is that the growing hostility toward Christians is very much a reflection of what outsiders feel they receive from believers. They say their aggression simply matches the oversized opinions and egos of Christians. One outsider put it this way: 'Most people I meet assume that Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, anti-gay, anti-choice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe.'"<sup>1</sup>

Kinnaman's words are both sad and alarming. The church is facing a crisis, yes, but there's another crisis brewing—a silent, invisible crisis—and it's happening to the person who stands *in* the pulpit: the church pastor! He needs encouragement, support, and prayer from people who love him and who care about him and the future of the church.

Many of the pastors' comments throughout these pages sound negative, complaining, angry, even hostile. I'm glad they felt free to openly voice their hurts and concerns. But that doesn't describe the hearts of these pastors. Yes, they yearn to be authentic, to bring their hurts and inadequacies to light, but only because they crave their church members'

love, respect, prayer, and practical help. The pastors who responded to this survey expressed a deep sacrificial love for their congregations, a dedicated calling into God’s ministry, a strong belief in God’s Word and the power of prayer, a genuine concern for the salvation of nonbelievers, and a longing to provide good pastoral care. They felt great urgency in the areas of missions and evangelism, but also a huge responsibility to accurately bring God’s Word to their members through careful sermon preparation, teaching, and preaching. I found them to be faithful servant leaders with God-given gifts and strengths who experience great joy when a person comes to Christ, immense satisfaction when Christian believers grow in their faith, and sincere gratitude to God when hurting people find spiritual healing through Christ. Pastors are people called to ministry, gifted by God to shepherd a particular flock, and given great hopes and dreams for God’s people, the church.

So why must we delve into today’s shepherds’ unspoken secrets? Why must we risk shattering the pastoral Spiritual Superman image in our effort to be authentic and real?

For one reason: These unspoken secrets can greatly hinder—if not completely destroy—the pastor’s God-given potential to minister effectively and fully to his congregation, his community, and his world. We need pastors! They are our captains on this great “ship,” and we must learn how to minister to them as they minister to us.

The pastors whose words and lives fill this book are painfully transparent. (According to Kinnaman, transparency simply means admitting what the Bible says about us: we are fallen people who desperately need God in our lives—every day.<sup>2</sup>) They open their hearts and lives, allowing you to see their faults, their fears, and their shortcomings. They refuse to pretend they are someone they are not. They reveal their inadequacies. They are authentic.

During the research and writing of this book, a religious person asked me: “Why in the world are you writing this book? If pastors want their church members to know something, why don’t they just come right out and tell them?”

Why? Because most pastors won’t just “come right out and tell them.” The reasons vary, but pastors are human beings, and most people fear rejection if they openly voice their fears and frustrations. Robert S. McGee writes: “When we fear rejection, we find it difficult to open up and reveal our inner thoughts and needs because we believe others will reject us if they know what we’re really like.”<sup>3</sup>

## 20 • WHAT PASTORS WISH CHURCH MEMBERS KNEW

### TELLING ALL

This book might just surprise you. It may even change your perception of the person who stands behind the pulpit. And that's good news! For if you can really know and understand your pastor, his humanness and his frailties, you can support him and help him accomplish authentic ministry that reaches out in Christ's name to a fallen and hurting world.

So, as you read the heartfelt responses of pastors around the country—set apart in smaller type throughout the rest of the book—I urge you to pay close attention and reserve judgment long enough to let their words sink deep.

Now then. What *do* pastors wish their church members knew?

### Your Pastor Is a Human Being

People often perceive that pastors are perfect, but they aren't—they're human, like the rest of us. Even the apostle Paul and Barnabas had to remind their followers that they too were human.

*“Men,” shouted Paul and Barnabas, “why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them...” Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. (Acts 14:15, 18)*

In the surveys, many pastors wished their church members knew ...

I'm human—just one person, with limitations.

I struggle with a strong desire to be perfect, but I never am. I wish my church members knew I had the same doubts, fears, and worries they have. I, too, am trying and working to live by faith.

I'm fallible, imperfect, and human just like everyone else. I have struggles with my family and people I really don't like (although I still love them and care for their eternal and spiritual welfare); and sometimes I get up on the wrong side of the bed!

I'm a person with some of the same fears and desires my church members have. Even though I'm not perfect, I still want to be loved by them. I wish they wouldn't expect perfection from me, and would forgive me when I make mistakes in judgment.

I am not infallible, inexhaustible, or all-knowing. I cannot read the minds of my church members or know intuitively when they need me.

I didn’t just fall out of the sky to be their pastor! I’m from somewhere. I have brothers and nieces and nephews and grandparents, and even though my church family never sees my biological family because of distance, I want them to know I’m human and they exist.

Some pastors also admitted they are, unfortunately, a little more human than they’d like to be.

I have a sense of my own insufficiencies, given the task before me as a pastor in the Lord’s church.

I’m often wracked with doubt about my leadership abilities. I’m not as confident as I present myself to be.

I wish my people understood my limitations. I need to be forgiven as I forgive. I need time to be me.

### **Your Pastor Has Human Problems**

As members of the human race, pastors also experience the personal problems that surface in all of us. In fact, for reasons unknown, God often *allows* those in his service to deal with problems and pain and pressures, and the apostle Paul is a good example of this fact.

Scripture tells us Paul had a “thorn” in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). Whatever it was, it slowed him down, caused him discomfort, and limited his work for God. But Paul readily admitted his “thorny” problem. He surmised that his thorn kept him dependent on God and not on himself. I’m sure the thorn served other purposes too. No doubt, it kept Paul humble, allowed his followers to see him as a human being with needs and personal concerns, and gave him a sense of greater compassion for others who experienced pain. God comforted Paul in his pain, and Paul comforted others in their pain (2 Corinthians 1:4).

The surveyed pastors also confessed their personal, and often painful, problems.

I, too, have problems. It seems my congregation thinks I’m bullet proof and have no problems. I wish they realized that even though I’m called of God and serving them, I have frustrations. Often their expectations are too unreal for a human to fulfill. I am only one person seeking to do what they seem to expect ten men to do. They want me to be a counselor, chaplain, preacher, financial wizard, prophet, mediator, marriage expert, part-time lawyer, Bible professor, and more. I just can’t do it all!