

HOW YOU CAN GET A BETTER PASTOR (Hebrews 13:17-19)

As I look about our culture, it appears to me that there is a hunger today for better leaders.

- Fans want their team to get a better coach.
- Workers want their company to hire a better boss.
- Voters want their state or country to elect better public servants.
- And I am certain that many church members want to be led by better pastors.

I want you to listen closely today because I am going to tell you from God's word how you can get a better pastor, and make no mistake, you need a better pastor; you deserve a better pastor, and you can most certainly have a better pastor. If you will do what God through our text is telling you to do, you will get a much-improved pastor.

Our text is Hebrews 13:17-19. Let's read it. Very simply, you and I are instructed to do just two things.

You Can Get a Better Pastor by Following the One You Have

Good leaders come in many shapes and sizes. Good leaders are not all alike. They vary in their personalities and their leadership styles. Not all leaders are extroverts. Not every good leader has a big, expressive personality. Some are introverted. It is possible to be shy and still be a good leader.

Some of the very best leaders are great at vision casting and seeing the big picture. Some exceptional leaders do a great job of managing staff and overseeing the work as it progresses.

Great leaders differ in their personalities and skills.

There is one common denominator, however, that is always shared by the very best leaders. Every successful leader has good followers. The fact is, good followers make good leaders. If you want a better leader, then you need to become a better follower.

Look at v. 17. Let's be honest. We don't like words such as *obey* and *submit*. They run against the grain of our pride. It makes us feel less than to think we have to do what someone else wants us to do. "Who is he to tell me what to do?", we grumble to ourselves.

The Bible seems to be big, however, on the idea of us obeying and submitting to someone else. Why is that? God has chosen to mediate His authority through human instruments. In other words, God takes His authority and shares it with some to lead and guide others.

We are told in the beginning of Romans 13:1, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." That's what we are to do. We are to obey and follow the directives of those who have positions of authority over us. In the context of Romans 13, Paul has in mind governmental authorities, but our obedience to government is not to be blind. A case can be made for civil disobedience, but unless we are told to disregard our conscience or disobey God, we are to submit to the governing authorities.

The remainder of Romans 13:1 tells us why. “For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” In v. 2, Paul presses his case further, “Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

In addition to giving us authorities in society, God has given us authorities in other venues. In Ephesians 5 & 6 Paul mentions three. He commands in 6:5, “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters.” Would I be out of line to glean from that verse that employees should serve their employers well? At the beginning of chapter 6, Paul instructed, “Children, obey your parents.” In 5:22, he taught, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

God has designated authorities in society, in the work-place, in the home, in marriage, and according to today’s text, in the church. What is the nature of this leadership? Is it to be top-down, dictatorial, demanding, and a domineering kind of leadership. No! A thousand times, “no.” That is not godly leadership; that is despotism.

Jesus teaches servant leadership. Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt. 20:26). The public servant is to lovingly serve his constituents. The parent is to lovingly guide his or her children. The husband is to lovingly meet the needs his wife—her material needs, her emotional needs, her physical needs, and her spiritual needs. The pastor is to lovingly lead the flock over which God has made him a shepherd.

We find this idea of shepherding in our text. The author of Hebrews provides the rationale believers have for following their church leaders: “For they are keeping watch over your souls.” The very wording evokes the Christmas story in Luke’s gospel: “And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (2:8).

We have done the church a terrible disservice by viewing it as a business to be run. This makes the pastor the CEO, and even worse, this makes the members of the church investors who are looking for a return on their investment. If such a return doesn’t materialize in a timely manner, they just might get impatient, sack the CEO, and get another one.

Twenty years ago, I read a wonderful book entitled, *The Church You’ve Always Wanted*. In the introduction to his book, Glenn Wagner explained: “In this book, I want to plead for a move away from the corporate model of ‘doing church’ and back to the relational model I believe the Bible champions.”

If you believe it is my job to make a bunch of corporate decisions for the church, you would be tempted not to obey and follow me. You might conclude, “He doesn’t have a good head for business,” and you might be right.

If, however, you view me as a shepherd who is trying to lead you to still waters, to safe pasture, to a place where you can be nourished and cared for, you would have every reason to follow me. Sheep who don’t follow their shepherd become prey for the enemy.

In addition to leading you spiritually, it also my job to lead this church to fulfill its God-given mission. Now, what is the mission of the church? Quite simply, it is three-fold. As the church, we are to love God. We are to love people. We are to make disciples. The first two are what we call the Great Commandments. The last one is the Great Commission. I have been called by God and by you to lead you to love God to love

others, and to make disciples.

My primary job is not to preach sermons. Now, I love the process of preparing messages from God's word, and I enjoy delivering those messages, but that is not my main job. My number one job is not to visit our members in the hospital. My job is to help you love God, love others, and make disciples.

Your job is to follow me as I lead Liberty Southern Baptist Church to love God, love others, and make disciples. If you are not following me as I seek to do those things, you are not doing your job.

Look at what else we can discover in v. 17. One day I will give an account for how I led you. One day I will stand before Jesus, and I will have to answer the question, "How well did you pastor and shepherd My people? Did you tell them the truth, and did you do it lovingly? Were you a godly example for the flock?"

Peter offers some wise counsel to pastors, and he includes a wonderful promise. Look at 1 Peter 5:1-5. When I was ordained as a pastor 35 years ago, this was the passage from which the ordaining pastor preached. I still remember much of what he said. One of his best lines was, "Don't preach cream and live skim milk." I am to be an example to the flock.

If I faithfully do what I have been called to do, I will receive the promise of v. 4. Regardless, I will most certainly have to give an account.

Verse 17 of our text offers more counsel. I wonder how many pastors do their work of spiritual oversight with groaning and not with joy?

In late 2021, the Barna Group released a poll that said 38% of pastors were thinking about leaving the ministry. The same poll claimed that only 60% of the respondents rated their mental health as being good or excellent. Here are some other statistics:

- Between 1500-1700 pastors leave the ministry each month.
- 61% of congregations have forced a pastor to leave.
- 83% of clergy spouses want their spouse to leave pastoral ministry.
- 90% of clergy in all denominations will not stay in ministry long enough to reach the age of retirement
- 90% of clergy in all denominations will not stay in ministry long enough to reach the age of retirement.
- 70% say they have a lower self-image now than when they first started.
- Here is the #1 reason pastors leave the ministry – Pastor's believe God wants them to go in one direction but the people are not willing to follow or change.

Verse 17 contains a warning to the reader: "If you make the pastor's job a source of groaning rather than joy, you are going to lose out on the blessing you would have received." This is simply a matter of, "You reap what you sow." It is unlikely that you will be built up by a pastor who has been discouraged. Odds are, you will not be motivated by a pastor who has been disheartened.

On the other hand, if you encourage your pastor, you will be encouraged by him. If you build up your pastor, he will be able to build you up. In short, if you bless your pastor, he will be used by God to be a blessing to you, and your family, and your community.

A lady in Illinois told about the time her pastor's sermon stretched on. Her daughter grew impatient and started to talk.

"Shh," the mother whispered. "I want to hear the sermon."

Later that week, she and her daughter saw their pastor while shopping. They exchanged greetings, and as they walked away, she asked her daughter, "Do you know who that was?"

"Sure," the girl replied. "That was the Sermon."

I hope that I preach helpful sermons, but more than that, I pray that my life will be an instructive sermon that God will use to guide and inspire you.

I want to be a good pastor, and I am convinced I will be a better one if you will follow me.

You Can Get a Better Pastor by Praying for the One You Have

Notice the imperative of v. 18. The author of this letter could not have asked for anything greater, and the reader of this letter could not have given anything greater than their prayers.

We have said many times during the journey through this letter that we do not know who wrote it. He did not supply his name nor has history recorded it. Based on the evidence of the text, we can make some assumptions. It seems likely that the author was a Jew because this is the most Jewish book of the NT. It is also apparent that the author was an educated man. His vocabulary, style of writing, and familiarity with the OT Scriptures show us he had been trained and educated.

Verses 18 and 19 of this chapter are the most personal we have yet encountered. He asked for prayer, and he expressed a desire to be restored to the presence of his readers. Again, we don't know where his readers lived, but it seems that he had served them in some capacity. He had been to them a teacher or a pastor, and he desires to return. To that end, he asks for prayer.

Through the years, I have received many gifts from those I have been blessed to serve. I have received tickets to OSU football and basketball games and tickets to concerts. I have received money, clothes, food, art, and other things. All those things were given graciously and were received gratefully.

Let me tell you the best thing, the most enduring thing, the most needed thing you could ever give your pastor—your prayer. I need your prayer.

Years ago, when I was serving another church, I formed a Pastor's Prayer Team. We met every Sunday before Sunday School in my office. I gave each person a document that I had borrowed from a book written by John Maxwell. The document was titled, "How to Pray for Your Pastor." I have copied that just as I typed it up 20-plus years ago.

I ask you to take that piece of paper. Put it in your Bible or lay it on your bedside table or your desk or wherever you are going to see it. Use it, and pray for me.

Earlier, I mentioned that pastors are feeling beat up, and many are ready to throw in the towel. That should not be surprising for numerous reasons, but one of those reasons that is often overlooked is mentioned as the last item on the front page of these prayer needs—spiritual warfare.

Satan is opposed to God; so, he opposes the people of God. Satan is opposed to the

work of God; so, he opposes those who are critical to the progress of that work.

In the war that is being waged in Ukraine, many high-ranking, Russian officers have been killed. This is no accident. They were targeted by the Ukrainian army. Ukraine understands that if you take out the officers you can throw your enemy into a state of confusion and demoralize them.

Satan knows that, too. I believe Satan targets high-profile leaders. He wants to make them stumble morally and thus smear the name of Christ in the process.

If he can't get them to stumble, he wants to discourage them and thus impede the work and progress of the gospel. It is difficult to go forward vigorously and take others with you when you are discouraged

Unlike the Holy Spirit, Satan cannot be everywhere at once. He can only be at one place at one time. It is possible that none of us here have ever been tempted by Satan himself, but we all have experienced his opposition through his demons who act on his behalf.

I'm not sure Satan even knows my name, but some demon does, and he wants to take me down, and some demon wants to take you down. We are in a war, and the secret to not becoming a casualty in that war is to put on the spiritual armor that God provides and to pray for one another.

Look with me at what Paul wrote concerning this. It is found in Ephesians 6:10-20. I want you to especially take note of v. 18. Notice the uses of the word **all**. We are to pray:

- At all times in the Spirit.
- With all prayer and supplication.
- With all perseverance.
- For all the saints.

In my humble opinion, one of the great monologues in cinematic history comes toward the end of the 1992 movie, *A Few Good Men*. Jack Nicholson portrays Col. Nathan Jessup who oversees the Marine forces at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. One of his men, Private William Santiago, died in a hazing incident. Two other Marines are charged with causing that death.

A Naval lawyer, Lt. Daniel Kaffee, played by Tom Cruise, is assigned to defend them. Lt. Kaffee believes that Col. Jessup is the one who ordered those two Marines to discipline Private Santiago, that he is the one who was ultimately responsible for the private's death.

There is a powerful scene in the courtroom where Lt. Kaffee is questioning Col. Jessup who is sitting on the witness stand.

Col. Jessup : You want answers?

Kaffee : I WANT THE TRUTH!

Col. Jessup : YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH! [*pauses*]

Son, we live in a world that has walls, and those walls have to be guarded by men with guns. Who's gonna do it? You? You, Lt. Weinberg? I have a greater responsibility than you could possibly fathom. You weep for Santiago and you curse the Marines. You have that luxury. You have the luxury of not knowing

what I know; that Santiago's death, while tragic, probably saved lives. And my existence, while grotesque and incomprehensible to you, saves lives. You don't want the truth because deep down in places you don't talk about at parties, you want me on that wall. You need me on that wall. We use words like honor, code, loyalty. We use these words as the backbone of a life spent defending something. You use them as a punchline. I have neither the time nor the inclination to explain myself to a man who rises and sleeps under the blanket of the very freedom that I provide, and then questions the manner in which I provide it! I would rather you just said "thank you" and went on your way, Otherwise, I suggest you pick up a weapon and stand at post. Either way, I don't [care] what you think you are entitled to!

Brother and sisters, we are at war. God has provided us with a wall of protection called prayer. I **want** you on that wall; I **need** you on that wall.

God wants to use us in the business of saving lives. Prayer is central to that enterprise.

You need a better pastor than the one you have; so, I urge you to get a better pastor by following the one you have and praying for the one you have.