



Two Questions that May Greatly Improve Your Church's Ministry¹

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I'm no management consultant, leadership expert, or church growth guru. But if you love your church and want to see it as effective as possible—for the sake of evangelism, education, exaltation, and whatever other E's you may have in your mission statement—try asking these two questions. One is from the pastor for his leaders, and the other is from the leaders for his pastor.

QUESTION #1—PASTOR TO LEADERS: “HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PREACHING?”

Most pastors have no mechanism for regular, thoughtful feedback on their preaching. Those laboring on larger church staffs may have a built-in worship review, but most pastors in the country don't enjoy such a luxury. And even if they do, it would be wise to solicit feedback from lay leaders in the church—the kind that are mature in the faith, have demonstrated longstanding commitment, but don't live and breath the details of planning and

evaluating worship services. I have my annual evaluation coming up in the next month. I plan on asking our elder vice-president how I can improve my preaching.

If preaching is the most important thing we do in ministry, why not be more deliberate about trying to develop new skills, weed out bad habits, and get some much needed fine tuning? For most of us, the feedback on our preaching consists of “Good job, pastor” or “Nice sermon, pastor” as people file out after the service. And when we get criticism it often comes from cranky church members who aren’t happy with much of anything. I think most church members love their pastor and are normally pleased with the preaching (or they wouldn’t stick around). But I also know that every pastor can get better. If Timothy was told to fan into flames the gift he had, shouldn’t we—I’m talking to my fellow pastors—look for ways to blow fresh wind across faint coals?

Obviously, this first question is not one you ask of just anyone. We aren’t looking to poll-test our latest sermon series. We aren’t trying to scratch itching ears. Parishoners may want more of what isn’t good for them in their weekly preaching diet. And yet, your best leaders should be able to give the pastor honest, thoughtful, affirming, constructive

feedback. I know it can be scary to even ask the question. But the spread of the gospel and the good of our people are more important than our sensitive psyches.

Over the years I can think of lots of helpful feedback I’ve gotten on my preaching:

Your introductions are too long. Don’t be afraid to dive right into the text.

Your sermons could be five minutes shorter without losing anything.

You seem rushed when you get to your conclusion. That’s often the best, most important part. Think about trimming back earlier in the sermon so you can slow down at the end.

Your content is great, but it can be too much.

Just be yourself.

Maybe, brother pastor, you need more illustrations, or fewer. Maybe you are going over people’s heads, or leaving the people a bit famished. Maybe you’ve developed a distracting mannerism, gesture, or expression. Maybe you’ve gotten into a rut. Maybe you are trying too hard to be creative. Who knows? Why not ask?

QUESTION #2—LEADERS TO PASTOR: “HOW CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?”

Like the first question, this one is dangerous. Pastors can be unrealis-

tic. They can be selfish. They can be lazy. They can be greedy. There is no sin you struggle with that we can't struggle with too. And yet, just like most churches love their pastor, I believe most pastors love their church. Very likely, your pastor is working hard, doing the best he can, trying to be a faithful preacher, leader, discipler, evangelist, spiritual caregiver, and family man. So why not ask how you can help him?

I can raise this issue because my church cares for me and my family very well. I'm not trying to send subtle hints and suggestions. In fact, it's because I am treated so well that I'm jealous for my fellow pastors to be cared for equally well. If asked how you can support him and his family, here are some of things you might hear from your pastor.

"My wife feels alone." Our elders formed "Team Trisha" a few years ago to care for my wife. It's a few other women in the church who meet with her regularly to hear how she's doing and find ways to help (especially when I'm busy or out of town).

"I could use more vacation time." I know most people in the church work hard at their jobs, sometimes for little pay and with little vacation. But your bad experience doesn't have to be the standard for everyone else. For the life of me I don't know

how some pastors survive on two weeks vacation per year. I recommend three weeks as a minimum, preferably four. In Britain, I'm told, six weeks is quite normal. One of the surest ways to decrease the effectiveness of your church's ministry is to get a burnt out pastor. When churches are sticklers with their pastor's vacation, they hurt themselves as much as anyone.

"I don't have enough money for books." Even a modest book allowance would be a tremendous blessing, and could pay big dividends.

"I'd like to attend a conference, but it's far away and kind of expensive." Find a way to make it happen. There are dozens of good conferences. Your pastors can't (and shouldn't) go to all of them, but it would serve his soul and serve your church if he could go to a couple—maybe a smaller local conference each year and one of the big national conferences. These conferences are only partly about the content. They are just as much for the fellowship, the friendships, the road trip, and the time away. Not to mention the free books.

"I could use more study time." This may mean making adjustments to the weekly grind so your pastor can devote himself more fully to the word of God and prayer. This may mean helping your pastor manage

his own time better. This may also mean adding one or two weeks of study time to your already generous vacation package. If the pastor actually uses the time to read, write, and reflect, I can't imagine a church regretting this sort of allowance.

"We are barely making ends meet." That's a tricky one. At least hear him out. Do what you can to make his service a joy and not a burden.

"Pray for me." Pray for your pastor in private. Pray for him if you have the opportunity to lead in prayer in church. Take time once in awhile to pray for him during your elders' meeting. See if he'd like a group to regularly meet with him for prayer.

Ministry is hard work. For all of

us—pastors, elders, church members, for every Christian. But let's not make it harder, or less joyful or less effective, than it has to be. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your church is the simplest thing: just ask the right questions. These two are a good place to start.

ENDNOTE

1. This article originally appeared at TheGospelCoalition.org. Used by permission.