



January 12, 2020

Bro. Larry will deliver a “State of the Church Address” in the worship services. Our small groups will discuss Chapters 4-6 of “I Am A Church Member” by Thom Rainer.

Chapter 4: I Will Pray for My Church Leaders

The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development has been studying the lives and ministries of pastors since 1989. Here are some of their findings:

- 90% of pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- 50% feel unable to meet the demands of the job.
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with the ministry demands.
- 71% of pastors are burned out (beyond normal fatigue).
- 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families.
- 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates will leave the ministry within 5 years.

- **Do these statistics concerning pastors surprise you? Why or why not?**

Scripture calls church members to be vigilant to pray for the pastor and other church leaders on a consistent basis. Pastors and church leaders have a difficult job and yet shepherding souls is a huge responsibility. Satan knows that if he takes out the pastor, the sheep will scatter. Your pastor and church leaders need your prayers more than you could ever know.

- **Why do you think pastors and church leaders need prayer on a consistent basis?**

A. Pray for the Pastor and Other Church Leaders

The biblical commands to pray for pastors and church leaders are subtle. Paul is the greatest champion of this idea and it appears several times in his letters to churches. Consider these verses:

Romans 15:30-32

30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

Colossians 4:2-4

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

1 Thessalonians 5:25

25 Brothers, pray for us.

Hebrews 13:18

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

- **As you consider these verses, what are the primary reasons that Paul asks for prayer?**

When you take inventory of these verses, you recognize quickly that Paul covets prayers from these church members for boldness and opportunity to proclaim the gospel, protection as he deals with hostile non-believers and integrity as he fulfills his God-ordained ministry.

As we consider the responsibility church members have to pray for their pastor, it is helpful to consider the three practical areas of a pastor's life, which Rainer noted in the book, that should be lifted up in prayer:

B. Pray for the Pastor and His Family

It has often been said that pastors and their families are a lot like fish living in a glass fish bowl. Everyone pays attention to see if the pastor and his wife ever have an argument and whether or not their kids are well behaved. This is understandable when we consider the biblical responsibility pastors have to manage their household well (1 Timothy 3:5). But, this is immense pressure and pastors and their families feel the weight of this pressure constantly.

Rainer wrote: "I have heard countless pastors worry about and struggle over their families. They worry that they neglect their families because of the demands of the church. They worry about their families living in a glass house. They anguish when critics direct barbs at family members. You get the picture. We are church members.

We must be the prayer intercessors for pastors and their families. Few families face the kinds of pressures and expectations as the families of pastors.”

- **What are your expectations of the pastor and his family?**
- **Are these biblical expectations?**
- **Do you pray for the pastor and his family on a regular basis?**

Pastors and their families are under spiritual attack constantly. Satan would love nothing more than to bring discouragement and discord into the life of the pastor. One of the easiest ways for this to happen is to attack his family. Pray for the pastor and his family!

C. Pray for the Pastor’s Protection

To say that pastors have a target on their back is an understatement. We have all heard of stories of pastors who have failed morally. This is usually followed by great distress in the church and discord in the community. Consider this passage from 1 Timothy 3:2-4 regarding a pastor’s qualifications:

2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive...

Pastors are called to be “above reproach” in their life and ministry. When we consider what is meant by these words, we recognize just how important it is to lift our pastors up in prayer.

Rainer wrote: “Just to get past ‘the above reproach’ part is an accomplishment! The word reproach means ‘to find fault.’ So to be ‘above reproach’ means to be above finding fault. While the pastor is certainly not expected to be perfect, he is to have a reputation above most everyone else. When people in the community speak or think about the pastor, the thoughts and words should be positive and encouraging.”

- **What does it mean for the pastor to be “above reproach?”**
- **Is that standard even possible?**

It is important for us to recognize that Paul continues, concerning the qualifications of pastors, by stating in 1 Timothy 3:7:

7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

In the same way that we might set a mousetrap out to catch a mouse in our house, we must recognize that this is the same kind of language used by Paul concerning the activity of the devil. He is skillfully setting out traps to try and catch pastors.

Rainer wrote: "If we understand the full implications of that word (trap), we wouldn't hesitate to pray for our pastor's protection. A trap is something that is set intentionally. It means that the devil has devised a plan to bring the pastor down. He has set a trap. It means that the devil sees the pastor as a threat, and one of his highest priorities is to take him down and take him out. And the text is clear. The nature of this trap will be temptation where the pastor's reputation will be harmed."

- **Why do you think the devil is setting traps for pastors?**
- **Knowing this, how much more of a sense of urgency do you feel to pray for your pastor?**

Even though the devil is working overtime to try and pick off pastors and wreck their ministries, we can be certain that our prayers are powerful. God is much more powerful than the devil and he works in amazing ways through the prayers of his people. Pray for your pastor's protection!

D. Pray for Your Pastor's Physical and Mental Health

If you have ever had responsibility to care for someone else, maybe a child or elderly parent, you know how much of a burden that can be. Pastors experience this same burden in the care for the souls of those under his ministry. In fact, James warns that not many should become pastors/teachers because they are held to greater accountability for those under their care and teaching (James 3:1).

Rainer wrote:

"Serving and leading a church well expends all of a pastor's energy. He is on call every day and every hour. Because the demands are so great on him, the pastor often neglects his own health and well-being. While no one is invulnerable to sickness and accidents, we can pray for the protection of our pastor's health. We should also pray for our pastor's mental health. In this regard I'm not referring to the opposite of mental sickness as I am to wisdom. The pastor has to make dozens of decisions each week that require discernment and wisdom. He needs wisdom to know what to preach and teach and how to present God's Word. He needs wisdom dealing with us church members each week so he can best discern how to respond to the plethora of demands upon him."

Pastoral ministry is a burden and it is also a great joy. Pray for your pastor's physical and mental health as he seeks to care for your soul and the souls of other church members!

- **Why do you think pastors often overlook their own physical and mental health?**

Rainer closes each chapter with a pledge that he asks each church member to sign and date:

The Fourth Pledge

I am a church member.

I will pray for my pastor every day. I understand that the pastor's work is never ending. His days are filled with numerous demands that bring emotional highs and lows. He must deal with critics. He must be a good husband and father. Because my pastor cannot do all things in his power, I will pray for his strength and wisdom daily.

Chapter 5: I Will Lead My Family to Be Healthy Church Members

Three pastors got together for coffee one day and found all their churches had bat infestation problems. "I got so mad," said one, "I took a shotgun and fired at them. It made holes in the ceiling, but did nothing to the bats."

"I tried trapping them alive," said the second. "Then I drove 50 miles before releasing them, but they beat me back to the church."

"I haven't had any more problems," said the third.

"What did you do?" asked the others, amazed.

"I simply baptized them and let them join the church," he replied. "I haven't seen them since."

Rainer noted that there is an unhealthy pattern for many church members. He emphasized that many people, "Get excited about church. Get more involved. Discover the imperfections of the church. Get discouraged about the church. Leave the church."

- **Have you see this unhealthy pattern in people's lives?**

Scripture emphasizes the need for families to instill healthy church membership into the fabric of their family's DNA. It is our responsibility to serve within the church, check our preferences and desires at the door, and pray for its leaders.

- **What are some hindrances that prevent families from being more involved in and committed to the church?**

A. Church and Family

Paul, in Ephesians 5 & 6, compares the family with the church.

Consider these verses: Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4

22 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. 6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Husbands and wives should relate to one another in the same way that Christ and the church relate to one another. Parents and children should relate to one another in the same way that we, as God's children, relate to our heavenly Father.

Rainer offered this insight into the text:

"These passages remind us that, just as we are supposed to sacrifice and love our families unconditionally, so are we to love those churches where God has placed us. Our family members are not perfect, and neither are the members of the church. We are to find our joy in serving both our families and the church. We are further reminded of the importance of the family to the church. We are to encourage our family members to be faithful to the church. We should pray together as family members for our churches. Indeed, as we are to strive to love our families more deeply, so should we exhort our family members to love the church more deeply."

B. Pray Together as a Family for the Church

Chapter 4 focused on the need to pray for church leaders. They are under physical, spiritual, and mental strain all the time and church members have a responsibility to pray for them regularly. But, have you ever considered praying for your church and its leaders together as a family?

Rainer offered several specific areas where you, as a family, can pray for church leaders: - For spiritual protection - For protection from moral failure - For the preaching of the Word - For their families - For encouragement - For physical strength - For courage - For discernment - For wisdom in their leadership Here are some specific ways that you can pray for the church: - For the gospel to change lives - For unity in the body - For impact in the community - For a heart for the lost - For sound doctrine - For specific ministries - For scheduled times of worship

There are fewer things that will cultivate a love for the church and its leaders within your family than praying for them on a regular basis. While this may seem awkward at first, it can often prove to be one of the most beneficial ways to keep your family involved in the church. Rainer wrote: "Part of the opportunity and honor of being a church member is the teaching of our family to love the church. And that teaching often begins by praying together as a family for the church where God placed us."

- **Do you pray regularly with your family specifically for the church and its leaders?**
- **If not, what practical steps can you take to begin doing this?**

C. Worship Together as a Family

Another way to lead our families to be healthy church members is to worship together as a family. The writer of Hebrews emphasized the need for believers to assemble together for worship. He wrote:

24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

It is evident that some believers had begun neglecting meeting together for worship and it was negatively affecting the church. We, as families, should strive to worship together as often as possible, both corporately and privately.

- **What hinders your family from worshipping together?**
- **What steps can you take to emphasize, to your family, the importance of attendance and participation in weekly worship services?**

D. Falling Deeply in Love with the Bride of Christ

The Bible does not give us the option of loving Jesus and not loving the church. If we love Jesus we will love His church!

Rainer wrote: "As a church member, I am not merely to like my church or serve my church well. I am to fall deeply in love with my church. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride. My commitment is to love that bride with an unwavering and unconditional love. Unconditional love means I will continue to fall more deeply in love regardless of the response. It means my love for the church will grow even as I may disagree with something or encounter disagreeable people. "

- **Do you love your church?**
- **Why is unconditional love such a challenge, especially as it applies to church membership?**

We are only able to love our church unconditionally when we understand that Jesus loved us unconditionally. Paul described Christ's love for us in Romans 5:8: *"But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Jesus loved his church so much that he willingly laid down his life to redeem her out of her sin.

- **How is Christ's death on the cross an example for us as church members relating to one another?**

The Fifth Pledge

I am a church member.

I will lead my family to be good members of this church as well. We will pray together for our church. We will worship together in our church. We will serve together in our church. And we will ask Christ to help us fall deeper in love with this church because He gave His life for her.

Chapter 6: I Will Treasure Church Membership as a Gift

During the Spanish-American War, Clara Barton was overseeing the work of the Red Cross in Cuba. One day Colonel Theodore Roosevelt came to her; he wanted to buy food for his sick and wounded Rough Riders. But she refused to sell him any. Roosevelt was perplexed. His men needed the help and he was prepared to pay out of his own funds. When he asked someone why he could not buy the supplies, he was told, "Colonel, just ask for it!" A smile broke over Roosevelt's face. Now he understood--the provisions were not for sale. All he had to do was simply ask and they would be given freely (Our Daily Bread, October 11, 1992).

For all of us who are in Christ, we too have received a gift – the free gift of salvation. This free gift was costly; it cost Jesus his very life. Yet, it did not cost us anything!

- **Why is the free gift of salvation such a precious gift?**
- **What did you do to receive this gift?**

When we treasure this gift, it will greatly affect the way we love, serve, give, and pray for our local church.

Rainer noted the two very different perspectives of church membership:

"In the first option we approach church membership similar to country club membership. We are joining the church to see what we can get out of it. The pastor is to feed us through his sermons. We have specified an acceptable range for the length of the sermon. The music is to fit our style exactly. Any deviations are not acceptable. The

programs and ministries are for our benefit. We will determine what we like and don't like. We are members who expect perks, privileges, and service."

"But there is a second option to church membership. It's the biblical option that sees membership as a gift, something to be treasured. Membership means we have the opportunity to serve and give rather than the legalistic option to do so. Our entire attitude is different when we approach membership the biblical way."

A. The Biblical Perspective of the Gift of Church Membership

Scripture is clear that salvation (the prerequisite for church membership) is a gift. Numerous verses give evidence of this truth:

Romans 3:21-26

22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Rainer explained:

"Do you see what's taking place? You received a gift, the free gift of eternal salvation. That gift includes eternal salvation. It includes forgiveness of sins by Christ's death on the cross. It includes adoption by God the Father. It includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And it includes becoming a part of the body of Christ.

That's right: membership in the body of Christ, the church, is a gift from God.

It's not a legalistic obligation. It's not country club perks. It's not a license for entitlement.

It's a gift. A gift from God. A gift that we should treasure with great joy and anticipation."

- **How does the gift of salvation relate to the gift of church membership?**
- **Why is it important to recognize this connection?**

B. Universal Church or Local Church

The term “church” is used in two ways. One way the term is used is to describe the universal church – that is “all believers everywhere for all ages.”

Another way the term is used is to describe the local church – that is a specific group of gathered believers in a specific place at a specific time.

The majority of New Testament books are written about and to local churches: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

Rainer wrote: “It’s a lame and invalid excuse to say you will limit your involvement to the universal church. The Bible is clear that we are to be connected to a specific church in a specific context.”

- **Why is it so important to be a member of a local church?**

C. Understanding the Gift of Church Membership

How do you usually respond when you receive a gift that you absolutely love? You likely respond with sincere gratitude to the giver.

Rainer wrote: “Church membership is a gift. A gift must be treasured. It should not be taken for granted or considered lightly. Because it is a gift, we must always be thankful for it. And when we are thankful for something, we have less time and energy to be negative. When we receive a gift with true appreciation, we naturally want to respond to the Giver. We, therefore, see service to God as a natural outflow of the joy of our salvation and the consequent joy of our church membership. We consider it a privilege to serve the King, so we look for those opportunities at the church where we serve.”

- **How should we respond to God knowing how precious the gift of salvation is that we have received?**

When we receive the gift of salvation and church membership with a grateful heart, we will naturally desire to serve within the body of Christ. We will recognize that our local church is composed of people just like us – sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. When we have this mindset, we will seek to love, serve, and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Sixth Pledge

I am a church member.

This membership is a gift. When I received the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, I became a part of the body of Christ. I soon thereafter identified with a local body and was baptized. And now I am humbled and honored to serve and to love others in our church. I pray that I will never take my membership for granted, but see it as a gift and an opportunity to serve others and to be a part of something so much greater than any one person or member.