

The myth about pastors

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The myth about pastors, simply stated, is that we are helpers; that ours is a helping profession, counted alongside doctors and nurses and emergency responders and teachers and social workers.

Over and over again in my ministry, however, I am reminded that pastors are *not* helpers. We are not fixers or healers or solvers. We do not, cannot, provide help. Which may sound shocking, because people often turn to pastors for help ... and pastors, in turn, like to think that they provide concrete help to others. But no, it is all a myth.

A story might add some explanation to my myth-busting:

This past week, my congregation loaned me out to the wider church to volunteer at our denominational [outdoor camp](#).

For seven days, my pastoral time and energy were focused on keeping an energetic group of 3rd - 6th graders safe as they climbed mountains & hiked streams & developed new friendships & peered closely at poison ivy, and on creating opportunities for them to connect the concept of God with the natural world around them.

At camp, falls and scrapes and bumps and bruises occur frequently. In my experiences with this particular age group, every fall or scrape or bump or bruise is inevitably a painful reminder to a young person that camp is not home. Last week, there was one camper in my group for whom a bumped toe prompted homesickness-related sleeping difficulties. *"I can't fall asleep, are you sure that we shouldn't call the camp nurse to look at my toe, the ice pack isn't helping, I have to pee (1am), I have to pee (4am) ."*

"It's okay, I can look at your foot again, I can walk with you down the path to the bathroom, let's wrap your toe in a Hello Kitty bandage."

But

at the end of all that I could do for my camper and her too at 4am, she still had to fall asleep in her bunk by herself. She still had to lie in her sleeping bag and navigate her own way through those dark-of-night moments of worry, the tears of homesickness, and the fears of that spider on the ceiling. I could not help her with those things. For all of the ways that I could talk and listen and keep her company and provide band-aids and emphasize that any deer wandering through camp would be more afraid of her than she was of it, ultimately she was alone with her thoughts. I could not get into her brain to help relieve the busy fears in her mind. I could not take every bug out of the cabin or add electricity to our small A-frame or make camp feel more like home so that she would feel more at ease during the night. She alone had to get herself to sleep.

I cannot help to mend or provide the tangible things of life, nor even help to resolve the emotional and spiritual wrestlings of life. I can be present; I cannot help.... *Read more at [Faith and Water](#).*