

I thank God for pastors.

By [Brian D. McLaren](#)

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Pastors know things that are painful to know. Pastors keep confidences even though doing so leaves others to assume the worst. Pastors are routinely insulted, cussed out, lied about, or lied to. Pastors face expectations that range from challenging to oppressive to depressing to maddening to ridiculous. Pastors have to make tough choices balancing the needs of individuals and the needs of the community, needs of the congregation and needs of the staff, not to mention their own needs and those of their families. Pastors are called in to deal with life's toughest realities—death, divorce, illness, prison, domestic violence, drugs, racism. Pastors have to keep congregations of diverse people together—even when political campaigns and culture wars try to divide them. And I haven't even mentioned the challenges and responsibilities of preaching.

Pastors live in a web of complex relationships. If they become close friends with members, problems can arise. If they don't, problems can arise. If they are open about their doubts, mistakes, and struggles, problems can arise. If they aren't, problems can arise. If their only income comes from the church, problems can arise. If they have multiple sources of income, problems can arise. If they address or engage with political issues they care about, problems can arise. If they don't . . . You see the pattern.

Meanwhile, when unethical or unwell pastors do terrible things, all the good and honest pastors also become the subject of increased scrutiny, even cynicism.

No wonder pastors get worn down.

And they're often so busy helping others that they don't even hear a little voice inside them crying for help.

I was a pastor for over 20 years, and nothing I have ever done before or since has been more difficult.

If you have a pastor who is doing a good job, be good to them. Let them know. When others lob grenades of criticism at them, speak up. Write a note. Say a good word of encouragement.

If you are a pastor/priest/minister/whatever, doing good work for God, your congregation, and the common good—I don't care whether you're liberal or conservative, Protestant or Catholic or Orthodox, gay or straight, man or woman, single or married, denominational or nondenominational: thank you, God bless you, and please, take care of yourself because the church needs you and the world needs you. Your life and work deeply, truly matter.

*Originally posted at [McLaren's blog](#)*