

Lifting Up God's Servants



But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us... 2 Cor. 7:6

I. Introduction: The "Titus Touch"

Consider the apostle Paul's words of transparency in 2 Corinthians 7:5-7 concerning Gospel ministry, and his servant's need for comfort and encouragement:

"For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more."

Consider the following:

- Serving as a pastor of a local church is a dangerous calling. Dr. Paul David Tripp, who is a Biblical counselor and pastor, wrote a new best-selling book entitled *Dangerous Calling*, which points out the challenges that pastors face in each of his calling.
 - Consider the findings of a survey conducted in 2011 by LifeWay Research of 1,000 American Protestant pastors:
 - A full 98 percent agree with the statement, "I feel privileged to be a pastor."
 - More than half (55 percent) also agree with the statement, "I find it is easy to get discouraged."
 - 55 percent say being in pastoral ministry makes them feel lonely at times.
<http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Research-Survey-Pastors-feel-privileged-and-positive-though-discouragement-can-come>
- There is a movement today to address this **Downstream Problem** of pastoral loneliness, discouragement, and challenges. It is the **Upstream Strategy** of joining God in His love and affirmation of pastors.

Notice from the text the phrase “God, who comforts the downcast”:

- God is about the ministry of comfort, which is the ministry of coming alongside to give strength.
- Another translation states, “God, who encourages those who are discouraged”.

Now consider this question—How did God comfort the downcast?

Look at the text in 2 Corinthians 7:5—“God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us BY THE COMING OF TITUS.”

- Wow! The God of the universe, full of power and strength, chose to use another available vessel to extend His comfort to a weary spiritual leader, Paul!
- Who is Titus?—a Gentile companion of Paul on Paul’s missionary journeys. He was the one sent by Paul to establish/start the church in Crete . . . he was with Paul in his second imprisonment in Rome before Paul was martyred. In this context of 2 Corinthians, Titus is the one who delivered a letter of rebuke to the Corinthian church and who shared in the positive response with the apostle Paul.
- Titus gave Paul the touch of encouragement.

Background of the Text:

- Paul’s association with the important commercial city of Corinth began on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18) when he spent 18 months (Acts 18:11) ministering there.
- Someone in the Corinthian church (possibly one of the false apostles) even openly insulted Paul (2:5–8, 10; 7:12).
- Saddened by the Corinthians’ lack of loyalty to defend him, Paul wrote from Ephesus what is known as the “severe letter” (2:4) and sent it with Titus to Corinth (7:5–16).
- To Paul’s immense relief and joy, Titus met him with the news that the majority of the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (7:7).

This is what is called *The Titus Touch of Encouragement to Pastors*.

Illus. —King Midas is popularly remembered in Greek mythology for his ability to turn everything he touched into gold. This came to be called the “Golden Touch” or the “Midas Touch”. . . .

- Titus—with his good news, the apostle Paul gained a new perspective and reassurance of the presence of the God who “encourages those who are discouraged”—i.e. The “Titus Touch” is the “Golden Touch” of encouragement.

According to 2 Corinthians 7: 5-7, there are several ways you can LIFT your pastor:

“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).
Pastors, reflect on a time when God brought a “Titus” into your life to encourage you at a time of distress:
I remember at a stressful time in my life when

and God brought (whom)?

II. LIFT Up God's Servants by Realizing the Pressures They Face

Consider in vs. 5—Paul becomes very transparent as he shares that he was “downcast”.

- This word speaks of being discouraged.
- The Greek word translates ‘low’ - i.e. Paul had experienced a low in life and ministry in which only divine comfort could suffice. Paul’s spiritual ‘gas tank’ was on empty.
- Discouragement is defined as a loss of confidence or enthusiasm; dispiritedness.
- One pastor shared, “Discouragement is like a wedge the enemy places in our hearts and removes courage from within us.”

Danger—‘defying’ characters in the Bible and spiritual leaders today. The reality is that strong spiritual leaders faced discouragement.

- Elijah was so discouraged that he wanted to die. So did Jonah.
- Moses was discouraged.
- Our Lord Jesus “sat weary at the well” in John 4.

Truth: If the great Apostle Paul faced discouragement in life and ministry, how much more will your pastor experience discouragement by being *downcast*?

Let us take note of several pressures that caused Paul to be discouraged that cause pastors today to experience discouragement.

1. *Fatigue of Body*

Vs. 5—“There was no rest for us” – i.e. to be physically spent . . . having no physical strength to continue.

- Many pastors work more than 50 hours a week because of the demands and pressures of ministry.
- Many pastors go weeks without taking a day off and go years without taking a vacation.
- Many pastors confess to feeling guilty for taking a break.

Quote—Wayne Cordeiro, a veteran pastor who has experienced ministry burnout, stated, “*Zeal and good intentions can fuel us in the beginning, but they won’t last in the long haul.*”

2. *Fights Without*

Vs. 5b - “we faced conflict in every direction”—“the conflicts without” are undoubtedly some kind of persecution or opposition.

- Paul and his missionary team were pursued from city to city by a group of hostile, unbelieving Jews who stirred up trouble for him wherever he went.
- The term conflict was actually used in Hellenistic Greek for military combat or sporting contests used figuratively of quarrels and fighting.
- Understand – Pastors who stand for the Gospel of Christ and the authority of the Scripture will face opposition, rejection, and threats from the unbelieving communities around them.

3. *Fears Within*

Fears Within—speaks of a pastor’s insecurity . . . when one is uncertain, anxious, and lacks confidence . . .

- Insecurity is what the young pastor Timothy struggled with—2 Timothy 1:7—“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”
- Insecurity is what Paul confessed—2 Corinthians 3:5—“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”

Understand—Insecurity is a feeling that all pastors struggle with no matter their educations, experiences, successes, or failures in ministry.

- Recall this after your pastor has preached a powerful sermon.
- Recall this on Monday mornings when your pastor is feeling low.
- Recall this when conflict arises in your church.

Transition—The first step to LIFT your pastor is Realize the Pressures Pastors Face.

Next:

3. **LIFT Up God’s Servants by Joining Him in His Ministry of Comfort**

Recall this awesome description of God in vs. 5—“God who comforts the downcast”

- Meditate on 2 Corinthians 1: 3,4 of our Lord being the “Father who is the God of all comfort”.
- Yet also remember HOW the God of all comfort strengthened Paul in his low state— “by the coming of Titus” – i.e. the golden touch of encouragement came through the available vessel of Titus.
- May God cause more available vessels like Titus to rise up in our churches to encourage our pastors in their eternal work of serving the local church!

How did Titus Relieve the Pressure Paul was experiencing in being down-cast?

- By the good news report to Paul that the Corinthians had repented
- By giving the proper perspective and reassurance of God’s presence

Consider ‘Good News’ to share with pastors:

1. **God is For You!**

Romans 8: 31-34—“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”

Illus.—Meditate standing at the Throne Room in heaven . . . Christ is seated on the throne, and all around the throne are accusations of church members making complaints about you . . . then you see Jesus standing at your defense and Jesus praying for you!

Encounter Jesus:

Pause quietly to picture Jesus bowed in prayer as you come close, you hear Him praying—and He’s praying your prayer list, for the burdens of your heart, the needs in your life. *“Who also makes intercession for us…”* (Rom. 8:34). Now respond to Him in gratitude. *“Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom. 7:25).

Remember the scene in the ministry of the prophet Elisha—when surrounded by the Syrian army:

2 Kings 6: 14-17—*“Therefore he (King of Syria) sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’*

So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

Engage Fellowship:

Let’s stand to pray with 1 or 2 others claiming the prayer of Elisha as we lift up His servants:

My prayer for you today is the prayer of Elisha for his servant—*“Lord, I pray, open [the] eyes [of your servants] that [they] may see . . . those with us are far more than those who are with them . . .”* May they see the invisible chariots of fire all around them!

A good news reminder for you to share with your pastor is—GOD IS FOR YOU and I am for you also!

Illus.—From denominational servant of pastors. Early on in one of my pastorates, I had a deacon who would always show up at my study on Sunday mornings for prayer, listen to my sermon intently by taking notes, and then would call and leave a message on my answering machine before I arrived home. It so encouraged me to know God is for me and that this servant-leader was too!

2. Your Ministry Matters!

Every pastor should be reminded of the perspective of 1 Corinthians 15:58—*“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

Consider several different translations of this verse to highlight its meaning to pastors:

- Amplified Bible—*“knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose]”*
- Barclay—*“knowing that in the Lord your toil does not go for nothing”*
- NLT—*“Know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.”*
- Phillips—*“Be sure that nothing you do for him is ever lost or ever wasted.”*
- Wuest—*“knowing that your fatiguing labor is not unproductive of results, as this labor is done in the Lord”*

Several phrases that may be used to encourage your pastor

- Your Labor of Preaching the Word Matters!—Isaiah 55:11—*“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*
- Your Labor of Leadership Matters! – 1 Corinthians 11: 1—*“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”*
- Your Labor of Caring for Those in Crisis Matters!—E.g. hospital visits, counseling ministry, etc. . . . Jesus says, *“When you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto Me.”*
- Your Labor of Discipleship and Evangelism Matters!—2 Timothy 2:2
- Your Labor of Shepherding Matters! – 1 Peter 5: 2-4—*“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”*

3. God Rejoices Over You!

Zephaniah 3:17—an incredible promise and perspective for a pastor and his family to be reminded of:

*“The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Words of affirmation and appreciation go a long way. Following are examples of ways to share words of affirmation.



- Publically through social media—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- Personally following a sermon
- Immediately by a text or email

Proverbs 16:24 states, *“Pleasant words are a honeycomb: sweet to the taste and health to the body.”*

Transition— The first step to LIFT your pastor is to Realize the Pressures Pastors Face. Relieve the Pressures He Faces by Joining God in His Comfort.

Next:

4. LIFT Up God's Servants by Recognizing Ways to Encourage Them and Their Family

Using the brochure entitled "50 Ways to Bless Your Pastor," recognize ways you can encourage your pastor and his family in the following ways:

1. By Actions

1 John 3:18—*"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."*

- Many people will say they love and pray for their pastors and pastors' families.
- It is important, though, to demonstrate the love declared.

50 Ways to Bless Your Pastor:

Lifting Up God's Servants—As They Love the Lord

1. Pray regularly for your pastor and his family. Form a prayer covenant group to pray daily for your pastor. Seven members praying one day a week provides daily prayer "covering".
2. Offer prayer covering for your pastor before church services.
3. Encourage and support at least one day off each week for your pastor to have "Sabbath rest"— and lovingly insist it happens!
4. Encourage and support an annual "spiritual renewal" retreat for your pastor to refresh intimacy with the Lord.
5. Affirm with notes and cards appreciation for your pastor's Christ-like character – his compassion, integrity, courage, dependability, etc.
6. Resist any negative comments or comparisons related to your pastor. Talk directly to him about any concerns.
7. Care for your pastor's health with annual check-ups, wellness plans, health club membership, and insurance.
8. Vulnerably and specifically share how God has used your pastor to challenge, enrich, and encourage your walk with Jesus.
9. Most pastors resist "receiving", so ASK, ASK, and ASK again! - E.g. How can I serve you? Support you? Help you?

Lifting Up God's Servants – As They Love Their Spouses

10. Provide a more than adequate, even generous, salary, insurance, and retirement compensation to your pastor.
11. Share a "date night" gift card to a favorite restaurant with your pastor and his wife.
12. Allow for you pastor's wife to "be herself" and be as involved in ministry as the couple discerns from the Lord.
13. Encourage and financially support your pastor and his wife as they attend "marriage strengthening" events and getaways.
14. Remember your pastor and his wife's birthdays and wedding anniversary with appropriate recognition, such as gifts, cards, and other blessings.



15. Celebrate “Pastor Appreciation Month” annually with notes, cards, and gifts to your pastor—and very importantly, honor his wife!!
16. Encourage and support your pastor in an appropriate sabbatical time away from ministry after 5, 10, 15+ years of ministry.
17. Provide creative childcare options to support your pastor and his wife for couple date nights and getaways.
18. Offer a church member’s time-share or vacation home for your pastor and his wife to have time away.
19. “Startle” your pastor and his wife with an unexpected note, card, email, or text just to communicate - e.g. “Thinking of you and praying for God’s blessing.”
20. Allow for your pastor and his wife to have “couple friends” in the church—without jealousy, pressure, or unrealistic expectations.

Lifting Up God’s Servants – As They Love Their Children/Families

21. Allow your pastor’s children to be “imperfect”, to “be kids”, and to be as involved in church activities as the family discerns from the Lord.
22. Give your pastor and his family unused sports or concert tickets. These make great surprise gifts.
23. Provide adequate and appropriate paid vacation days for your pastor—and lovingly insist on them being used.
24. Provide for and protect your pastor’s family’s privacy, days off, and vacation time.
25. “Know” your pastor’s children—their interests, hobbies, and activities—and then ask about them and support them.
26. Allow and encourage your pastor’s family to have “family friends” in the church—without jealousy, pressure, or expectations.
27. Acknowledge and celebrate your pastor’s children’s birthdays, accomplishments, and victories.
28. “Startle” your pastor’s family with an appreciative card and an appropriate family-friendly gift.
29. Bless your pastor’s family with a special Christmas gift or anniversary gift, communicating, “We are excited that the Lord has blessed us with each of you.”
30. Bless your pastor and his family with gift cards or “service coupons” of all types - e.g. family restaurants, groceries, water parks, housecleaning, yard work, tree trimming, car repair, babysitting, painting, etc. These are always a blessing.

Lifting Up God’s Servants – As They Love Their Neighbors Through “Doing Life” with Other Jesus Followers

31. Provide appropriate time off and finances for your pastor to attend conventions, seminars, conferences, and continuing education—separate from vacations.
32. Encourage and support involvement of your pastor and his wife in men’s and women’s activities—without pressure to “lead” them.

33. Encourage and support your pastor to participate in a community-wide pastors covenant group where peer encouragement and accountability can be given.
34. Encourage your pastor and his wife to have friendships both in the church and in the broader kingdom community.
35. Invite your pastor along on fun outings—fishing, hunting, sailing, golf . . . not to talk church . . . but to relax.
36. Invite your pastor or his wife out for lunch . . . not to talk church . . . but to relate.
37. Allow for and support reasonable time away for your pastor to serve other churches, previous ministries, and kingdom initiatives.
38. Invite your pastor and his wife or family to enjoy a favorite vacation spot, community celebration, sporting event, etc.
39. Initiate caring involvement for your pastor and his family as they face challenges, e.g. sickness, death, etc.—as well as celebrations, e.g. new baby, graduations, weddings, etc.
40. Encourage and support your pastor being disciplined by mentors in the faith as well as discipling others both within and beyond your church.

Lifting Up God's Servants – As they Lovingly Witness Through Imparting Their Very Life and the Gospel

41. Encourage your pastor's involvement in activities, hobbies, sports, and events that engage the unreached.
42. Celebrate and affirm your pastor's stories of sharing the Gospel in the "traffic patterns" of life.
43. Support and encourage your pastor and his family's involvement in their neighborhood and community as they become "friends of sinners".
44. Celebrate and affirm your pastor and his family's involvement in kingdom works of compassion and justice.
45. Initiate strategies that connect your pastor with the marketplace as kingdom principles are applied to work, business, school, and community.
46. Celebrate and affirm "whole life" discipleship for your pastor where the Good News is lived and shared as an identity all week long, not merely a Sunday job.
47. Affirm the Concentric Circles of Discipleship as your pastor discipled his own home, mentors others, and wins and discipled the unreached.
48. Encourage and celebrate for your pastor a lifestyle of prayer for the unreached—through prayer lists, prayer walks, prayer gatherings, etc.
49. Encourage and celebrate for your pastor a lifestyle of caring for the unreached—through compassion and love as one who "has been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).
50. Encourage and celebrate for your pastor a lifestyle of sharing with the unreached—through listening to their stories, sharing their stories, and imparting His story.

2. By Attitude Vs. 4, 7-9

Consider how the members of the church in Corinth encouraged the apostle Paul by their attitudes toward him:

Vs. 4 – “I have great confidence in you; I have great pride in you. I am filled with encouragement; I am overcome with joy in all our afflictions.”

Vs. 7-9 – “and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.”

Understand—*Your attitude affects your pastor!*

- Be an enricher by your positive, grateful attitude.
- Do not be a drainer.

Conclusion:

Reflect on vs. 5,6—“For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.”

What would have happened IF Titus did not touch Paul in his time of discouragement?

- What might have occurred in the advancement of the Gospel in Macedonia?
- What might have occurred in Paul’s travels and writings?
- We do not know, but we realize there would be some form of hindrance.

What occurred because Titus DID encourage Paul?

- God was glorified by the joy of the news Titus shared.
- Paul was edified by both the coming of Titus and the news Titus shared.
- The Gospel was multiplied by it being shared with others.

Meditate on:

- The care and love your pastor displays to you
- The oftentimes he is fatigued, frustrated, and low
- Picture Jesus with His arms of comfort outstretched to your pastor and his family
- Joining Jesus in loving your pastor and his family well by extending the ministry of comfort

Experience Scripture:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget none of His benefits” (Ps. 103:2). God has “benefited” you greatly through pastors and other of His servants.

Together with 1 or 2 others, spend time blessing the Lord—thanking Him for His servants.