**What Your Preacher Does Not Tell You**

(by David McClister)

Preaching is a unique vocation in many ways. The preacher handles the most valuable commodities in the world: the word of God and the hearts of people. His goal is to get the former into the latter as much as he can. It is much easier said than done. He has to deal with misconceptions of the Bible and of his own work, both of which make his job of teaching more difficult. He has to preach on topics that are sometimes not well-received. He has to be confrontational and yet meek at the same time.

You may think that you know what a preacher does, but my suspicion is that you only know the side that you see at church gatherings or social events. There are, however, some things you probably do not know about your preacher, but knowing them might help you to understand him and his work better.

**1. Most of his sermons are aimed at himself.** Have you ever wondered where a preacher gets the motivation to address the things he preaches about? Some of it is the joy of sharing the fruit of his personal Bible study, and some of it is generated by the specific needs of the church with which he works. But a well-kept secret among most preachers is that most of the time, they are preaching at themselves. You see, a preacher cannot figure out how to make a Biblical truth fit the lives of 100 different people. He does not know them all well enough, and he does not have the pulpit time, to craft a personal application for each member. So his choice of topics often reflects what he himself needs to hear, and when, in his sermon, he is suggesting how to apply the word, he usually has his own life in mind. Sometimes a person may think that they have been “targeted” by a particular sermon (which is actually quite rare), but most of the time the preacher has targeted himself. This brings us to the next well-kept secret…

**2. The hardest thing about preaching is living up to the message one preaches, and it is just as hard for the preacher as it is for you.** Preaching is a self-humbling exercise, unless you have ice in your veins. Some of the TV evangelists may be preaching without any conviction, but I do not personally know of my preaching brethren who are like that. It is difficult to hear the word of God (even from your own mouth) and not be humbled and awed by it. Since the preacher is usually the closest one to the message he is preaching (see point #1 above), he is often quite challenged by it. It is an awesome thing to tell people what God demands of them, and the responsibility to conform to God’s will is just as difficult for the preacher as it is for anyone else. He fights the same battles, with about the same amount of success, as any other sincere Christian. He is not superman.

**3. He sometimes feels a little lonely.** I don’t mean “all lone” lonely, or “abandoned” lonely, but sometimes your preacher finds himself with no one to share either his thoughts, his ups or downs, or his concerns. Why would a preacher feel lonely when he has a family and a church full of people with whom he can associate? One of the reasons is that his mind is usually in a very different place than most other people. Because of the nature of his work, the preacher is constantly reading, studying, and meditating upon the word of God to an extent that few others experience. As a result, the preacher often grows spiritually at a faster rate than most others around him – not because he is a genius, but simply because he is taking in more spiritual food every day than most others take in. This does not make him “holier” than others, but it does edify him to a degree that many others do not experience, and this creates a sense of isolation and loneliness. Sometimes he learns a fascinating thing from his study, and it fills his soul with joy and excitement, but he has no one to share it with who can appreciate it in the same way. Also, he thinks about the church all the time, and he worries about it as well. Most of the members of the congregation are not as absorbed with concern about the church as the preacher is, and so he can feel a little isolated at times.

**4. Contrary to appearances, he cannot do it all, and he does not want to do it all. He just wants to be the preacher.** He is often expected to be part counselor, part manager, part trainer, part children’s story-teller, and part academician, as well as an attention-holding public speaker. He is expected to be “cool” with the young people but also to fit in with the older folks – all this in addition to usually being a husband and father at the same time. It is demanding at the least.

But your preacher just wants to be the preacher. He does not want to be the jack of all trades, and in fact, he cannot be. He lacks the skills and training to do professional-level counseling, and his personality is no more elastic than anyone else’s: he cannot fit in with everyone equally. He wants the elders to do the shepherding, and he wants the entire group to pitch in and work together in the group projects, programs, visits, and activities. He does not want to be the default manager or leader of everything that the church does. He does not want to be the referee when brethren fight, and he does not want to be the church building furnace repairman. He just wants to preach, because …

**5. The reason he decided to preach as his life’s work is because he would be miserable if he did not.** Preaching is not something your preacher took up casually. Contrary to the opinions of some, preachers do not preach because they lack the skills to do regular work. Nor does he preach for the compliments. “That was a good sermon” is not actually what a preacher enjoys hearing most at the end of the services. Preachers preach because they have Jeremiah’s fire in their bones. Your preacher could do something else for a living, but he would not be happy because for him the greatest joy in life is the service of the Word. He *has* to preach; he would feel empty if he did not.

I hope these things will give you some insight into what your preacher is about, and I encourage you to tell your preacher that you appreciate him and the work he does. Support him well and learn from his efforts, and let him do his job. He is doing the greatest work in the world.