

“Pastor Jesus”

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Jesus started higher and descended lower, so he understands everything in between.

Hebrews 4:14-16

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What a pastor does

What does a pastor do? It depends on the church, depends on the pastor, and depends on the week. Here’s a partial list of what I did this week.

- Monday I wrote our weekly Bible study sheet, met with five people joining the church, and met with the hymnal supplement team.
- Tuesday included five hours of meetings – staff, an architect, Consistory – and a conversation with a couple who’s been visiting Corinth.
- Wednesday I wrote the memorial meditation for Willie Mae Ingold, 103. I met with one of our baptismal candidates and helped set up the pool.
- Thursday included Bible study, Willie Mae’s memorial service, lunch with Roger Young, chair of our Pastor Search Team, and a pastoral care appointment.
- Friday I received an email from a church member facing heart-wrenching trial. It ended with, “I just can’t anymore. Where are you, God?” I also talked by phone with someone who is wondering what to say to an agnostic friend who has scheduled her assisted suicide. I had dinner with a single Dad and his two very active boys.
- Saturday I prepared for today’s sermon, worship, Sunday School, and baptism. Then I met with the family of a 28-year-old woman to plan her memorial service. After that, I met with a couple getting married next year.
- This week I also replied to or initiated about 300 emails.

If you’re feeling sorry for me, don’t. I love what I do. If you think I always know what I’m doing, don’t. My favorite quote about being a pastor is from Eugene Peterson,

who paraphrased *The Message*: “It amazes me still how much of the time I simply don’t know what I am doing, don’t know what to say, don’t know what the next move is.”

Two qualifications

If you’re looking for a career path with a guarantee of available work, consider pastor. Call us what you will – preacher, reverend, priest, or, as the late George Murphy used to call me, Padre – this role will always be in demand. It’s universal, even among other faiths. Why? Because (a) there are humans, who are by nature very needy, and (b) almost all of us have the awareness of a God who made everything and who’s wise and powerful, but too often invisible and silent. “Where are you, God?”

There are two primary qualifications for being a pastor: faithfulness to God and compassion for people. A pastor is essentially a connector between humans and God. It’s terrifying and deeply rewarding to have people look to you and ask, “What does God say? What does God think of me? Can you help me connect to him?”

No one knows for sure who wrote the book of the Bible we call Hebrews. I call him Barney because (a) I like the name, (b) It was my grandfather’s name, and he was a pastor and missionary (c) It’s short for Barnabas, who was a missionary partner of the Apostle Paul and might have written Hebrews. Barnabas means “pastor” – well, not literally. The name means “Encourager,” but that’s what a pastor is. We come alongside to encourage you in your attempts to connect with God.

I think Hebrews is a sermon, not a letter. Barney wrote it to people who were Jews by birth, Greek by culture, and Christians by profession. They may have lived in a city like Alexandria Egypt, and they needed encouragement to stay faithful to Jesus with so many alternate voices and pressures pulling them away. They were asking their own version of, “Where are you, God?”

Barney’s one-line answer is, “If you’re looking for God, look at Jesus.” He’s the imprint of God on a human form. Christians would later summarize Jesus this way: he’s fully God, fully human. Pastor Barney didn’t use those words, but that’s his message. And, he says, Jesus is better than any other way you’ve tried to connect with God – much better. He’s better than prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua.

In today’s excerpt from Barney’s sermon to the Hebrews, he begins a theme that he will develop across several chapters: Jesus is better than the high priest. Because you and I don’t think very much about high priests, we might need a different parallel.

Jesus is better than your pastor. He’s better than any pastor. He’s more articulate than Charles Stanley, more miraculous than Benny Hinn, wiser than Tim Keller, and kinder than Joel Osteen. Pastor Jesus is the best example ever of faithfulness to God and compassion for people.

Daddy, please!

This is Barney's point in Hebrews 5:1-10 with the high priest analogy.

In verses 1-4 Pastor Barney reminds his listeners of some key points about an Old Testament high priest.

- He is "appointed to represent the people in matters related to God" (1). He's not self-appointed, he's "called by God" (4).
- He is "able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray" (2). Just like a pastor. The word translated "deal gently" is exactly halfway between "I don't care" and "Oh, you poor thing."
- He "is subject to weakness" (2) and "has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people" (3). He needs help too.

In verses 5-7, Barney says Jesus is that, but even better. He's like a high priest because he too was appointed by God. Christ "did not take on himself the glory" (5). He's better than a high priest because he's the Son of God (5) and because he's a forever high priest (6). He's more like a mysterious priest in Genesis named Melchizedek. Melchizedek was better than the Jewish high priests because he was Abraham's priest and because we have no record of his father. He was like Jesus – or maybe even he was Jesus in pre-incarnate form. Don't get too lost on that point. What Barney is saying is that Jesus was better than the best priest, better than the best pastor. He is appointed by God and 100% faithful to God.

He is also 100% compassionate with people. Why? The key verse is 7. While on earth, Jesus had to pray. Think about it. The God who created the universe became as dependent on God for provision, direction, and help as you and I are. If he needed something, he had to ask: "Daddy, please!"

Sometimes he had to beg "with fervent cries and petitions." "Daddy, please take this cup of suffering away!" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That's the compassion part, but he was also faithful to God. "He was heard because of his reverent submission." He was heard, yes, but the answer was No. Have you ever prayed and the answer was No? Jesus knows what it's like.

Barney is responding to those who say, "Jesus can't have really known what it's like to suffer like I do, because he was the Son of God." Jesus started infinitely higher than you (as the Son of God) and suffered infinitely more than you (on the cross). If he started higher and descended lower, he can relate to every struggle in between.

That's why Pastor Jesus is the best Pastor ever.

(Pastor Paul's part of the sermon can be found in video form at corinthtoday.org/live.)