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# Adventist Journey

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## My Journey

Wherever this journey takes me, I want to continue to be engaged with people. I have a unique opportunity that some pastors don't have to interact with some of the world's leading scientists, people who are very smart, people who are trying to understand where we are headed as a planet. I want to see where God is going to lead me.

Visit [vimeo.com/nadadventist/ajlucienmanayobo](https://vimeo.com/nadadventist/ajlucienmanayobo) for more of Nana Yobo's story.

**LUCIEN NANA YOBO,**  
geologist and Ph.D. student, lives in Texas  
and is president of Adventist Christian Fellowship.

*Lucien Nana Yobo*



Cover Photo by Dan Weber

**Dear Reader:** The publication in your hands represents the collaborative efforts of the North American Division and *Adventist World* magazine, which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

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## ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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SaMonna Watts talks about God, life, and faith during an interview. Photos provided by SaMonna Watts.

# When the Miracle Is Not God's Will

EDITED BY MYLON MEDLEY  
from an interview with SaMonna Watts

God promised SaMonna Watts victory when her young son was diagnosed with cancer. She continues to live in victory five years after his death.

**H**ow in the world can I encourage anybody with the way that this story just ended?" SaMonna Watts prayed in the moments after her 5-year-old son Brayden had passed away in July 2014 from the effects of medulloblastoma, a rare pediatric cancer that affects the brain and spinal cord.

Watts had just finished a conversation with God that led to an understanding of the five-month fight against the disease.

"God spoke to my spirit," said Watts. "He said, 'SaMonna, this whole time you've been praying for your will to be done saying it's *My will*.'"

"At that point, I went back into the room with my baby—with my son. I got on my knees and had so much clarity of where I was and what I was asking God for at this point. I said, 'Lord, if it is Your will for Brayden to take

his rest, I accept it. If it's Your will for him to be healed and to make it through, I accept that too. But whatever it is, Lord, I can't take any more of this torture. Please do it now."

"Before my husband and I got off our knees, Brayden went to sleep just right there while we were praying. He looked so peaceful. After all this time, he [finally] looked so peaceful and I had peace. I thought, *Wow, that's God's will.*"

## An Unexpected Turn

In February 2014 Brayden started to complain about headaches. Multiple trips to the doctor yielded no explanations, until one night when he was rushed to the hospital after waking up in the middle of the night screaming in pain.

"We found something," the doctors told Watts. "There's a mass on your son's brain. It could be a tumor. It could be a cyst. We don't know. Whatever it is, we have to find out immediately."

Their world was shattered; Watts questioned everything, even the call God placed on her life to act as a spokesperson on His behalf by sharing encouragement. She had felt something missing from her life. She left her job at a law

firm after she had Brayden and their second child to raise them at home. Her plan was to return to work after five years. When those five years came to an end the financial strain led her to begin working and earning money again. During one particular job interview she was faced with a jarring question: "What would you do if one of your children got sick?"

"I thought, *If my child got sick, they're number one. I'd have to leave, do whatever.*

"The person interviewing me must have sensed my thoughts . . . and said, 'You know what? I don't think you're ready to return to work.'"

Watts realized there was some truth to that statement, but that didn't erase the financial need she hoped finding a job would help address. But that was not God's plan. In fact, Brayden fell ill exactly one month after the interview.

## Accepting Victory

Brayden underwent surgery a couple days after the initial discovery. The procedure was a success, but the surgeon said he believed Brayden had cancer. After additional testing, Brayden was given a 50 percent chance of survival. His family was told he would need seven rounds of radiation and chemotherapy to treat the stage 4 cancer. There was also a high chance that he would lose his hearing and mental capacities, and have stunted growth as a result of the aggressive treatment.

"Please just stop speaking. Just don't say another word," Watts recalled telling the doctor. "Your options are my son either dies or he won't be the son that God had given me."

Watts reflected on how God told her He would give her victory when the mass was first discovered. "It was the clearest I've ever heard God's voice in my spirit. He said, 'SaMonna, what makes you think I won't bring you through this victoriously?' That's all I needed."

## No More Options

The Watts family traveled from their home in the Washington, D.C., area to Philadelphia, where Brayden received his radiation treatments. His family stayed at a Ronald McDonald House, which provides housing for families as their children undergo long-term hospitalization.

"It was a very mind-opening and heart-wrenching experience to see all these little kids running around with their bald heads [from the effects of their treatment]. It was the experience of a lifetime," said Watts. "It really opened my eyes to the pain that a lot of people are going through."

Brayden made it through his radiation treatments. However, when the doctors examined him before it was time for chemotherapy, they discovered that the cancer had spread throughout his body. Chemotherapy was no longer an option.

"There's nothing we can do," doctors told Watts.

"I just remember sitting in there thinking, *This is not real. This is a TV show. This is not really happening to me. God, I was worried about 'chemo' and now they're telling me he's going to die,*" said Watts.

They were told Brayden might survive for a couple weeks; or he might make it only a few days. They were given a prescription for hospice and sent home.

"I said, 'I'm not going out like this for my baby. I'm going out with a fight,'" said Watts.

Watts learned about an Adventist doctor in Mexico who practiced alternative medicine and offered a treatment that could help address Brayden's need. The cost? \$50,000. Watts logged on to Facebook that same evening—Friday—and drafted a post for the thousands of people who were following Brayden's story and offering prayers and words of encouragement. She shared how they needed \$50,000 to pay for the treatment. The response was immediate.

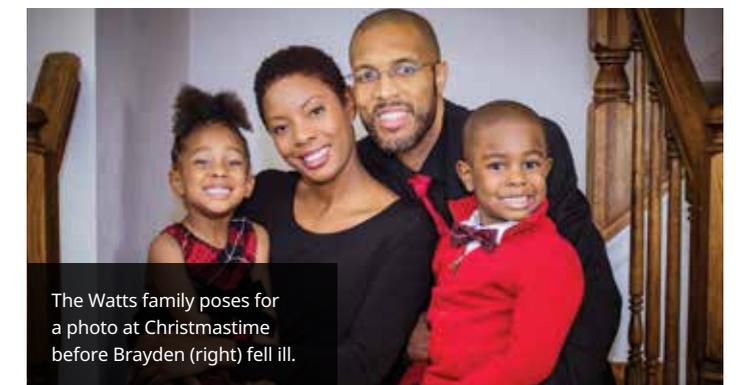
"We were on the plane with \$50,000 on Monday morning," said Watts.

## The Journey to Peace

The alternative treatment did not work. In fact, Brayden got worse. His condition was so bad he couldn't physically handle the flight back to the U.S. Fortunately, Watts' in-laws lived within driving distance away in California.

Three weeks after they transitioned to her in-laws, Watts received the assurance from God that Brayden passing to his rest was in His will, and that she and her family would see victory despite their pain.

"My God of love waited on me to get my heart and mind right before He let Brayden go to sleep. The way those doctors were



The Watts family poses for a photo at Christmastime before Brayden (right) fell ill.

talking about Brayden's condition, he shouldn't have survived the trip to Mexico. They said he might not survive a week. But God prolonged [his life] so that my heart could be right and I'm just thankful for that," said Watts.

"In that process I believe that He was training me or transforming me into who He wanted me to be so that now I could speak for Him," continued Watts.

She decided to go back on Facebook to inform her cyber community of Brayden's death, but she wrestled with how the news would impact the faith of those who prayed and believed that Brayden would be healed. She said it would appear as though the devil had won, and God had lost.

"But that's why He's God and I'm not. I don't know how He worked that thing around, but it is the most encouraging story. God showed me there are more people out there who are going to experience hard times. That's just the nature of a sinful world. They're not going to be receptive to the person who had the miraculous healing, because that's not *their* story."

Watts has felt a special anointing to encourage people who are hurting, grieving, and feeling lost. She has a passion to tell them that victory can be manifested in many unexpected ways. She had prayed that her son would not lose his hearing or various mental capabilities. She had prayed that he would grow to be tall like his father. God had told her, 'When Brayden grows in the new earth, he's going to be a lofty stat-



SaMonna Watts praises God during her son Brayden's funeral.

"God showed me there are more people out there who are going to experience hard times. That's just the nature of a sinful world."

ure. Of course, you didn't want him to die. . . . He's not dead for eternity. He is sleeping in Jesus.'

"God answered my prayers. He did. At the end of the day I wanted my child to be in the kingdom, and that's it," said Watts. "I know his 5-year-old little heart. He is going to be saved. [I'm confident about that.] God gave me victory. He gave me victory, and I'm so, so thankful for it."

**Sharing the Victory**

Watts' story fuels her work of life coaching, leadership training, and public speaking. She has given her testimony at numerous churches and events, and on Hope Channel's *Let's Pray* live television program.

Watts was also invited to share her story on Three Angels' Broadcasting Network (3ABN), but when it was time to record, her emotions felt too heavy, and she doubted her ability to carry on. She recognized that the devil was attacking her, so she prayed and was able to participate in the interview. Months later she received a call from someone who happened to stumble upon the channel that aired her testimony.

"They said they were drinking their last drink or smoking their last cigarette, preparing to commit suicide," said Watts. "The person said, 'The TV suddenly came on; I don't know if I rolled over the remote or what happened, but there you were sharing your story with a smile on your face. I thought, *If she can go through that, surely I can make it through what I'm going through.*'"

Watts says she has committed herself to freeing others from the grasp of the devil when they are in their darkest times. "That brings me the greatest satisfaction. The devil uses death and other hardships to really just pull you in. If I can help [free] other people, my job is done. I love doing what I do. It makes me very happy."

SaMonna Watts was featured as the video cover story of the September 2018 edition of *Adventist Journey*. Her full interview can be viewed on [www.vimeo.com/ajsamonnawatts](http://www.vimeo.com/ajsamonnawatts). Watts and her husband, Van, have two daughters (pictured left). Learn more about her ministry on "Extraordinary Living" by visiting [www.samonnawatts.com](http://www.samonnawatts.com).



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# CHURCH LEADERS EXPERIENCE MISSION AND DIVERSITY DURING DIVISION TOUR

The 2019 NAD Experience highlighted education, health care, worship, local church and school outreach, and more.

BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN

**S**eventh-day Adventist Church leaders from around the world witnessed mission in the North American Division (NAD) context when they visited several locations in the division during the 2019 NAD Experience, held June 26 to July 7, 2019. General Conference executive secretaries and spouses joined the executive secretaries and spouses from the church's 12 other division offices as NAD leaders shared a glimpse of the territory's mission activity and ethnic diversity through touring four of nine union conferences: the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, North Pacific Union Conference (NPUC), Pacific Union Conference, and Southern Union Conference. Division experience tours were held in 2017 in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division and Inter-American Division.

"Our goal is for them to see that North American Division members and leaders are passionately involved in the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," said G. Alexander Bryant, NAD executive secretary. "We also want them to see that the context of doing that mission in our territory is somewhat different than in other places around the world. We all have to have different methodologies in trying to reach the people in our territories."

Bryant shared that the tour's purpose also included displaying the division's diversity. "Many people look at us and think that we're primarily one ethnic group; but we're a diverse group with no ethnic majority in our territory. In each of those union conferences our guests will see the great [world of] diversity and how it is part of our mission to serve that world in our territory."

The tour is part of an initiative developed by world church leaders in an effort to cultivate understanding and learning of methods, programs, and activities that make the difference in each world division. "Since 2000 we have had this division experience," explained G. T. Ng, General Conference executive secretary. "Division leaders often cocoon themselves in their respective divisions, hardly having a chance to look beyond the horizon."

According to Ng, the experience is an educational trip for the leaders to see why divisions are successful in certain specialized areas. For example, the South American Division tour featured the study and



← During the 2019 NAD Experience division tour, church leaders from around the world pose for a photo at AdventHealth Celebration in Florida. Provided by AdventHealth



↑ G. Alexander Bryant, North American Division executive secretary, and Desiree, his wife, enjoy a presentation near the start of the 2019 NAD Experience division tour, which ran June 26 to July 7, 2019. Enno Müller

experience of the success of the small group ministry. For North America, one highlight is community service.

### Are You A-OK?

In the NAD the first stop of the tour was Church in the Valley, in Langley, British Columbia, Canada, a movement in

which reflecting Jesus through community service is the top priority.

Mike Dauncey is pastor at this Seventh-day Adventist church that focuses on outward facing Acts of Kindness (AOK), a charitable initiative that aims to build community and cultivate better lives for area residents.

The initiative connects people—church members and nonmembers—who "have a heart for their community with the resources and tools needed to enrich the lives of their neighbors and friends," reads the AOK Facebook page description. "Since 1996, in collaboration with other local agencies, and through the generosity of major donors, Acts of Kindness has supplied food, education, shelter, support, and compassion to thousands of individuals in Aldergrove, Langley, and beyond." Extreme home repair, Cars for Moms, summer day camps for kids, and kindness cards are just a few of the programs coordinated through the church's AOK.

"The Church in the Valley is a remarkable display of members and leaders with a vision and passion for the mission of reaching the people in their communities," said Bryant. "They are quite involved in community outreach programs such as doing oil changes for single mothers, and giving cars away to single mothers. They restore homes for people who need it. They do all kinds of youth outreach activities in the community."

Bryant shared that it was "just breathtaking as the different leaders from around the world saw what one local church was doing. One of the things they said was while the Adventist Church is trying to plant centers of influence, that local church is the center of influence in that community."

Said Ng, "That ministry offered by the Church in the Valley—a church that specializes in offering community services without strings attached—is the highlight of the trip."

### More Influencers

The next leg of the tour, through the North Pacific Union and Pacific Union conferences, echoed the NAD Experience themes of diversity and mission. Attendees made stops at the Washington Conference office, Walla Walla University (and its Rosario Beach Marine Laboratory), and Auburn Adventist Academy. Sabbath morning, June 29, was spent worshipping at the Samoan camp meeting at Auburn, themed "Fa'Ailoa Mai" ("Show Me Your Way"), and based on Psalm 25:4, 5.

In the Los Angeles area the tour group visited Loma Linda University Health, its Gateway College initiative, and La Sierra University. They also experienced the El Monte Vietnamese Seventh-day Adventist Church and Evangelism Center, a "church of influence" in the local Vietnamese community in which

↓ Mike Dauncey, pastor, explains how the Church in the Valley's outreach program, Cars for Moms, part the Acts of Kindness charitable initiative, works to the 2019 NAD Experience participants. Dan Weber



tutoring, counseling, summer camps, and language programs are just some of the activities run through the evangelism center.

The group went up to the Sacramento/Oakland area, where they met with entrepreneur and restaurateur GW Chew at the GC-sponsored center of influence, VegHub, a vegan restaurant that caters to the Oakland community; and toured Adventist Health headquarters and Pacific Union College.

“This is a great opportunity for all of us to learn from each other,” said John Freedman, NPUC president, as reported by Steve Vistaunet in a North Pacific Union *Gleaner* article. “We want our brothers and sisters from around the world church to witness firsthand that we are partners with them in the Adventist message and mission. Even with the unique challenges of each world region, we must be aligned in moving forward together on God’s call.”

**More Fellowship and Interaction**

The NAD Experience traveled to its final destinations in Florida, part of the Southern Union Conference, wrapping up with three



↑ As part of the division tour, Adventist Church world division secretaries and spouses, along with General Conference and North American Division leaders, enjoy walking the grounds of Elmshaven, one of the places where Ellen White made her home. *Stephanie Leal*

“Even with the unique challenges of each world region, we must be aligned in moving forward together on God’s call.”

days of touring Adventist institutions in the Tampa and Orlando areas. This included North Tampa Christian Academy, Calvary Community Clinic, AdventHealth Celebration Hospital, AdventHealth corporate headquarters, Florida Conference headquarters, Orlando Junior Academy and its edible schoolyard, and Haitian camp meeting (Sabbath worship).

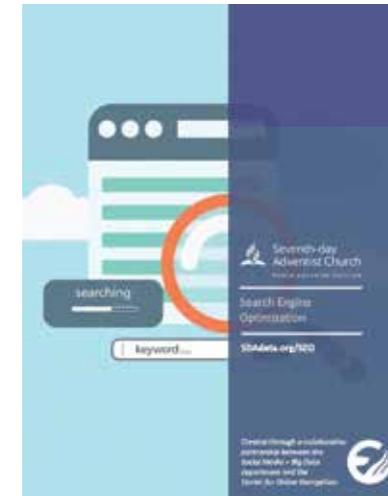
“Nothing brings understanding better than meeting each other in person and sharing our endeavors,” said Lars Houmann, FACHE, AdventHealth chief corporate relations officer. “It was a great pleasure to show the group a sampling in Florida of what AdventHealth is doing to extend the healing ministry of Christ.”

At AdventHealth Celebration in the Orlando area, the tour group witnessed how the church helps people in need of care create a life of “whole health.” The extensive campus offers care for body, mind, and spirit.

“Having the leaders from the world church tour the AdventHealth Celebration campus was a blessing and honor,” said Juleun Johnson, director of Mission and Ministry for AdventHealth Celebration. “The healing ministry of Christ is extended from the pulpit to the bedside. In the pulpit we share about Jesus’ love and compassion through stories. At the bedside we demonstrate Christ’s healing touch by restoring hope and wholeness through whole-person care. Both methods of service are needed to share with the world that Jesus loves them and is coming back again.”

← After chef/restaurateur and entrepreneur GW Chew shared how VegHub started, and the philosophy behind the General Conference’s Centers of Influence initiative, executive secretaries from the Adventist Church’s world divisions enjoy homestyle vegan dishes. *Enno Müller*

NAD NEWS BRIEFS



← The North American Division’s Search Engine Optimization Guidebook (cover shown here) is designed to help Seventh-day Adventist entities evangelize online.

Adventist entities evangelize online through effective content creation, website ranking best practices, and reputation management.

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically been at the forefront of using tools and technologies to advance present truth—from print to radio to television. Now is the time to leverage the untapped potential of digital communications, such as search engine optimization, for the customization of our ministry services as part of a broader digital strategy that relies on making data-driven decisions,” states Alvin Kibble, vice president for Big Data + Social Media, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, and Literature Ministries.

This 142-page document is a culmination of nine months’ work as well as a collaborative partnership between the NAD’s Social Media + Big Data department and the Center for Online Evangelism. It’s a step-by-step guide designed to

be easy to follow and implement. It will be a “living document,” which will undergo regular updates as technologies change, but the underlying philosophy will remain largely the same.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is an ever-evolving set of strategies used in online marketing to help organizations reach more of their target audiences. It is the process of utilizing a variety of techniques to positively impact a website’s visibility in unpaid search engine results. The higher a website ranks when a person googles search terms related to it, the more web traffic it receives. Most people do not scroll past the first page of search engine results.

“Our challenge as a church is to embrace these techniques in order to cut through the clutter online and reach more seekers in an increasingly digital world,” said Jamie Domm, digital strategist for the NAD.

“By being intentional and strategic, we can improve our digital curb appeal and encourage more people to encounter, and possibly embrace, our message,” added Domm.

Visit [SDAdata.org/seo](http://SDAdata.org/seo) for more info.

—Big Data + Social Media

NAD RELEASES GUIDE TO SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION FOR MINISTRIES

The North American Division (NAD) recently released its first comprehensive guide to search engine optimization for ministries. The Search Engine Optimization Guidebook is designed to help Seventh-day

ADVENTIST SCREENING VERIFICATION NOW AVAILABLE FOR THOSE WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN

As of June 18, 2019, Verified Volunteers, in its efforts to remain consistent with the organization’s branding, is operating under the name Sterling Volunteers. The name chosen for all the North American Division background screening and training needs is Adventist Screening Verification.

“It is a common practice for a company to change its name as needed,” explained Ernest Hernandez, director of the Office of Volunteer Ministries

(OVM), regarding the name change from the organization that partners with the NAD, “but that can be confusing for some. So we have determined that it is now a great opportunity for the church to select a parent name that can remain in our publications and website landing pages on a permanent basis.”

The web-based platform features a training and screening system for both employees and volunteers across all conferences in the divi-

sion. Those over 18 who are elected to serve in volunteer roles within churches or organizations within the NAD, or those who are employed by the church and working with children and youth are asked to complete a criminal background check (FB 20) and child protection training through Sterling Volunteers by way of Adventist Screening Verification. This should be completed every three years.

—NAD Office of Communication



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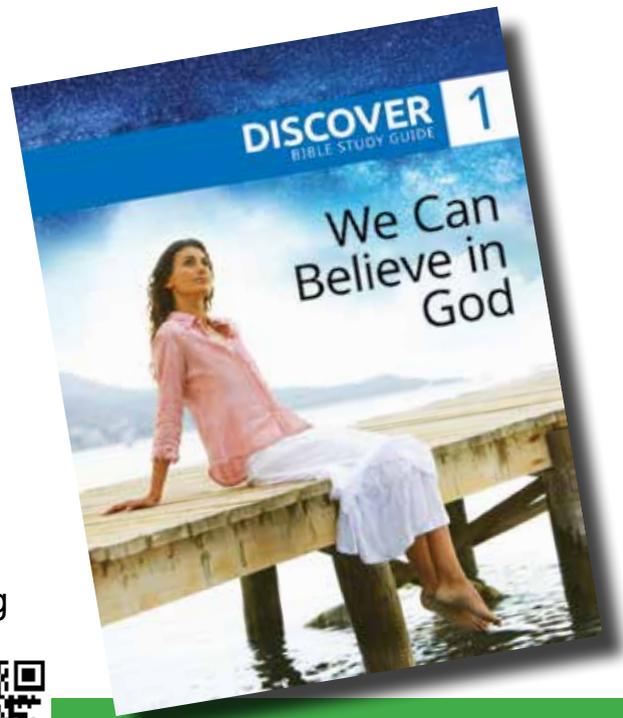
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BY DAVE GEMMELL

# Debunking Five Myths About Your Pastor

Throughout the years I've heard several myths about pastors. With October—and pastoral appreciation month—just wrapping up, I thought I'd do a little pastoral myth busting.

**Myth 1: Pastors work only one day a week.**

Most people only see their pastor on Sabbath. What they don't realize is that pastors are on call 24/7. Their work takes them to homes, hospitals, nursing homes, cafes, businesses, schools, the telephone, email, social media, and their home office. While the range of hours per week is wide, the median workweek for pastors is about 50 hours a week.<sup>1</sup>

**Myth 2: Preaching is easy.**

What could be so hard about talking for a half hour? Nothing, if a pastor has nothing to say and hasn't prepared. Fortunately, most pastors take their preaching seriously. Good preaching involves studying the needs of the community and the congregation; immersing oneself in the context, historical setting, audience, language, and words of Scripture; praying over the application for today's setting; squeezing in 15 hours of prep time needed between all of the other scheduled and unscheduled ministry demands, with the vulnerability of standing up front and talking to a bunch of people; then doing it all again next week. Despite the difficulty, most pastors love preaching and teaching and rate themselves better at this than any other pastoral skill.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth 3: Pastors' families are perfect.**

"You should know better than that. You're the pastor's kid." I was appalled when I heard those words spoken to my 11-year-old son and realized that some members have unrealistic expectations of pastoral families. Spouses and kids are not employed, and are in that role through no choice of their own. They deserve the unconditional love of the congregation just as much as anyone else.

While pastoral marriages are not perfect, 96 percent of married pastors are satisfied with their marriage and divorce is at a much lower rate (10 percent) than the general population. Pastors also rate their relationship with their kids at a higher rate than the na-

tional average. Those pastors who report lower family satisfaction report they are in difficult ministry settings.<sup>3</sup> Pastors who lack seminary training are also at greater risk for family dissatisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

Take good care of your pastoral family, make a way for them to get the education they need, and your pastor will take good care of your church family. One way to take care of them (shameless plug!) is to help with some of the costs of the 2020 Pastors Family Convention.

**Myth 4: Pastors appreciate regular criticism.**

No one flourishes in a climate of regular criticism, not even pastors. Yet for some reason, some pastors are exposed to more criticism than others. Pastors in smaller congregations, younger pastors, and female pastors are more likely to report getting criticized than older pastors, pastors in larger congregations, and male pastors.<sup>5</sup>

**Myth 5: It's the pastor's job is to do ministry.**

Actually, the pastor's job is to equip the saints to do ministry.<sup>6</sup> The biggest frustration of pastors today is lack of lay commitment.<sup>7</sup> If you let your pastor do all the work, you are facilitating a dysfunctional relationship. Instead, let your pastor equip you, empower you, teach you, mentor you, and let you flourish with the spiritual gifts God has given you.

Let your pastor equip you, empower you, teach you, mentor you.

<sup>1</sup> thomrainer.com/2013/07/how-many-hours-does-a-pastor-work-each-week/  
<sup>2</sup> The Barna Group, The State of the Pastors, p. 102.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-37.  
<sup>4</sup> Observations from a ministerial director from a conference that had a significant number of pastors who did not have a seminary degree, comparing their family satisfaction with those who had completed a degree at the seminary.  
<sup>5</sup> The State of the Pastors, pp. 76-79.  
<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:11.  
<sup>7</sup> The Barna Group, The State of the Pastors, p. 99.

Dave Gemmell is an associate director of the NAD Ministerial Association.



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