

SERMON STUDY GUIDE

July 26, 2026 | Rev. Henry Clay

The Problem of the Pedestal

Sermon Text: Isaiah 50:5-6; Acts 14

Sermon Outline:

1. The Peril of the Pendulum
2. The Pain of the Pastorate
3. The Privilege of the People

Questions:

Opening

1. Think of a leader — a pastor, teacher, coach, or parent — you've either put on a pedestal or been too hard on. What made you swing one way or the other?

1. The Peril of the Pendulum

Isaiah 50:5–6; Acts 14

2. In Lystra, the crowd first tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods, then turned around and stoned Paul. What does this swing from worship to violence reveal about how people tend to treat their leaders? Have you seen a version of this pattern play out in a church you've been part of?
3. In Acts 14:15, Paul insists, "We also are men, of like nature with you." Why is it dangerous — for both the leader and the people — to put a pastor on a pedestal? Why is it just as dangerous to tear one down?

2. The Pain of the Pastorate

4. The sermon named several pressures unique to pastors: being a lightning rod for conflict, isolation, loss of relationship after a transition, public scrutiny of their family, being on call constantly, and being a specific target of spiritual attack. Which of these had you never really considered? How might it change the way you relate to your pastor?

5. Think back over the past year. Was there a time you needed the church, or your pastor specifically? What did that support — or the lack of it — mean to you?

3. The Privilege of the People

6. Read the Spurgeon quote on prayer sustaining his ministry. How often do you actually pray for your pastors by name? What's one way you could make that a regular habit this week?

7. David refused to "lift up his hand against the Lord's

anointed," even while Saul was hunting him (1 Samuel 24:10). What would it look like, practically, to extend that kind of grace to a pastor who disappoints or frustrates you?

8. The sermon listed what pastors do for you: baptize your children, teach them about God, serve you communion, marry you, stand with you in crisis, visit you in the hospital, comfort you in a diagnosis, bury you when you die. Which of these has your pastor actually done for you or your family? Take a moment to name it out loud.

9. Jesus warned that even wise, God-sent messengers would be persecuted by the very people they came to serve (Matthew 23:34). Where might you be tempted toward "friendly fire" — criticism, gossip, or coldness — toward a pastor or leader in your life?

Closing Application

10. "Are you easy to lead? Are you a source of joy or pain for your pastor?" Be honest — how would you answer this week? Choose one: be prayerful, be grateful, be helpful, or be gracious. What's one concrete step you'll take in the next seven days?