

LESSON ESSENTIALS

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 5: BUILDING AND MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Even in a small church there can be a sense of ‘fame’ surrounding the pastor and his family. Sometimes the key ministry leaders seem unapproachable only because of the position of authority they hold. This can make being a leader feel very lonely at times.

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Everyone needs relationships. There is not a single person who can successfully live their Christian life without the help and stability of good, godly friendships. From a mentoring, encouraging, counselling, and supporting perspective, a good friend can help you discern the truth of God's Word when it may be difficult for you to see it.

All the more so, it is crucially important that ministry leaders not isolate themselves and try to do ministry on their own. We are made for community. The Book of Ecclesiastes contains one of the most compelling rationalizations for the need of close friends. Having that 'second cord', or that 'third strand,' is often what gives us the strength to grasp the grace of God and to refuel mentally and spiritually so that we have more to give to our ministry.

But how can a ministry leader build and maintain appropriate, honest, energizing relationships in the midst of a busy ministry? And how can they be certain that the sensitive issues that they may need to discuss will be kept secret and dealt with using discretion?

Because of these sensitive issues and feeling like there is no one to talk to, it can be lonely in a ministry position or in a role of authority. Still you do need community and support: even with the very real needs for privacy and confidentiality you need to find someone to talk to you and to help support you. So who can you trust? Who in your church could you talk to and enjoy spending time with? While professionals and peers in ministry are very useful from an occupational standpoint, you also need to have someone who is simply a friend. You need to take off the weight of responsibility that your ministry position carries and just enjoy time with friends and family.

Obviously, the priority relationship must be with your spouse, if you are married. If you have not been investing time in to that relationship then you must start there. Arrange for special time together and spend time pursuing the hobbies you enjoyed together before ministry took up so much of your time. Pursue friendships together with other couples so that you are deepening your marriage in many ways. Show your spouse that you value their input into the decisions and issues that are facing you and let her be your 'sounding board'. Tell them your ideas, ask for their opinion, and listen to their godly counsel. You need them. They need you. Let this relationship be the first one that you develop and maintain and then from it develop other friendships with couples and individuals that the Lord leads you to.

It may be that you do not think you need friendship in your life. You may be quite happy to go it alone. Challenge your thinking on that: do you see that if you think you don't need help, you may be being deceived? Even the most quiet and introverted person still needs a support group. Even the shyest person needs to have someone to talk to. Perhaps you are unwilling to admit that you are lonely or need assistance. Perhaps you

see it as a sign of weakness. You may be right! The Lord does not see our human weakness as a bad thing. He does not see our need of others as a shortcoming. He knows that we need each other. He designed us that way. You need to be humble enough to allow people into your life to hear your needs and to pray for you; to see your life and to comment constructively and lovingly on what they see; and to share experiences with you and to laugh with you, finding the joy in this season of life.

Also, just because you may be a ministry leader does not mean that you are above accountability. The Bible says that in the same way that iron sharpens iron, so man can and should sharpen man (Proverbs 27:17). We need someone in our life to hold us to our goals and intentions and to help us to live a godly life. As much as you may thrive in that role in someone else's life, you need the gift of 'eyes and evaluation' from someone else into your own life.

The side benefit to you developing and maintaining friendships is that it helps keep you healthy in every measure so that you do not grow weary from the stress of your ministry and quit prematurely. By working on appropriate balance and health in your personal life you will be even better equipped to serve your church than if you'd only just poured everything into the congregation at the expense of yourself.

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IN REVIEW

- We were created for the community which the church provides, but we were also created for individual relationships that bless us on a personal level.
- If you are married, your spouse should be the first friendship you develop. Together, you can invest in friendships with other couples.
- You will need to use discernment in who you choose to be your friends so that they are able to listen to the issues on your heart with privacy and discernment.
- Do not let pride or fear of weakness stop you from enjoying the rich blessing that friendship can bring to your life.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Are you an accountability partner or mentor to a young believer? Do you see the benefit to the faith of that person? Why would you not let yourself benefit from that same type of relationship? Pray, asking the Lord to bring into your life someone who can lovingly and constructively speak into your life.

- When is the last time you went out with friends and did not talk about church or ministry? When is the last time that you just laughed and enjoyed a social time with your spouse or with friends? Make plans today to arrange a fun outing – it is healthy to do so!

- Meditate on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Thank the Lord for the ‘cords’ that He has knit you together to. What are the areas of your personal or ministry life where you feel like you are falling down? Do you have anyone to pick you up and help you to keep going? If not, pray and ask the Lord to give you that kind of friend.

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