

Personal Pitfalls of Leadership

Detailed Outline Part 1 of 3

We will start with a premise: we live on a fallen earth, and all of us are fallen creatures.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

(Rom. 8:22–23 ESV)

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? (Rom. 18:7)

We generally do not realize that we can cry day and night—at least not until we have been married, have kids, or become an elder.

Let us talk about some of the pitfalls of being an elder.

I. Avoiding a Consistent Time in the Scriptures

A. This is about the quiet time and personal devotions.

1. Americans are afraid of being alone and this is a struggle for many elders—to spend time alone in quietness before the Lord.
2. It is important that as a priority we have our quiet time with the Lord.
3. Remember that this should not include sermon preparation, Bible teaching, counseling.

B. This is time where the Lord deals with you.

1. It is you and the Lord time.
2. This is the one source of joy to the Christian, the elder, and a church leader.
3. Illustration:
 - a) I met with five pastors who were burnt out. The question I asked to get them back into the place of restoration was “Tell me about your quiet time.”
 - b) Part of the healing process for them and their wives was to spend quiet time with the Lord. Not with an agenda to accomplish something or for someone, but for themselves.
4. Our confidence is that we can be restored by spending time with him alone.

C. Only God can revive our soul.

1. Don’t fall into the pitfall of missing out on the quiet time.
2. Let God do his sovereign grace work in your own hearts as you spend time with him.

“Come to me, all who are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28)

D. This is addressed even to the elders.

1. Take time with God and he will give you rest.
2. The word “weary” implies exhaustion. Church leadership can be exhausting.
3. He will give rest and that is his promise to the elders.

II. Avoiding a Consistent Accountability with One or Two Others

A. Elders must have accountability partners.

1. We need people to tell us to shape up, and sometimes we have none.
2. We consistently avoid spiritual and emotional accountability.
3. Illustration: I have been meeting with an accountability partner for the past seventeen years. We meet once a month and go through an agenda of topics. Some of them are:
 - a) How are you dealing with your wife?
 - b) How are you dealing with your kids?
 - c) How are you dealing with your ministry?
 - d) How are your finances?
 - e) How is your exercise program going?
 - f) How is your diet?
4. Be honest with the other person. Be transparent about your answers.

B. The devil wants to get us by ourselves.

1. We see the principle of accountability in the Scriptures.
2. Example, Jesus sends out His disciples two by two.

“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!” (Eccl. 4:9–10)
3. Watch out for the warnings—there are a lot of people who are falling around us. We need to guard our own heart.

III. Avoiding Reality and Substituting Hiding and Blaming

A. Don’t blame others for our personal problems.

1. It is in our fallen nature of hide and blame. We learn to avoid blame, and to become emotional hidiers.
 - a) Depressed
 - b) Fearful
 - c) Anxious
 - d) Angry

2. These are common to elders who have been in ministry.
3. It is easy to be a hider or be in denial.
4. We live in the false illusion that elders are supermen not impacted by the frailties of life.
5. We blame. For example, we might say, "The reason why I am angry person is because I am Irish, or Italian, or German." We blame our ancestry, parents, geographical locations, and the list could go on.
6. The real reason however, is that we are hidiers.

B. Blaming God is part of the hiding process.

1. Just like Adam we blame God too.
2. Genesis 3:8–13. Notice the three things that have happened since the beginning of mankind.
 - a) They hid themselves (v. 8).
 - b) They were afraid (v. 10).
 - c) Adam blames God (v. 12).
3. Elders might find themselves caught in the same blame game.
 - a) "Lord, if I didn't have this woman things would be better."
 - b) "Lord, if I didn't have this church things would be better."
 - c) "If I didn't have this responsibility of being a church elder, it would be much better."
 - d) "You put me in this situation. Lord, it is your fault."
4. God is telling us today to come away from the bushes. He knows all about you.
5. Stop hiding from each other. God wants us to come and say this is the way it really is.

Conclusion

We need to avoid the pitfalls of:

- Not having a consistent time in the Scriptures
- Avoiding consistent accountability with one or two others
- Hiding and blaming others

Personal Pitfalls of Leadership

Detailed Outline Part 2 of 3

Richard Baxter, a Puritan author, speaking about the people of his day, said, “They come to the assembly with bleeding hearts.” That is America today, and the responsibility of church elders is to help mend their hearts.

Here are three pitfalls that church leaders must avoid within the church.

IV. Avoiding the Main Issue

A. Spending time and energy on particulars without sharing the gospel

1. There are so many areas and issues that can take up our time and energy that the main thing is not the main thing anymore.
2. Examples: Christian education vs. secular education, gun rights, abortion rights, same sex issues
3. Not that these are not important, but the highlight of the ministry must remain the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. Illustration: In my role as a student counselor I often have to discuss homosexual behavior. I could talk about the recent studies or even specifics such as DNA etc., in trying to explain such behavior. However, the real focus as a counselor and elder must remain the need to show them Christ.
5. The gospel is the answer to all of life. Let it remain the main issue.
6. Illustration: I am a deer hunter and as I wait on the tree stand, I let the rabbit, raccoon, etc. pass by. The main reason I am up there is for the deer, that is my interest. Even so as elders, we must remember the main reason we are up there is for the dear souls of the people we serve.

B. The gospel is the reason.

1. Good news without the bad news is no news.
2. Talk to them about the law, the Ten Commandments, sin, how they offended God and how they have come under the wrath of God. Don't forget to give the entire gospel.

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of

the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.
(2 Cor. 4:1–7 ESV)

V. Avoiding Taking the Role of the Elder Lightly

A. We need to ask if we are gifted to be an elder.

Ask as you spend your quiet time with God,

1. “What is my motive for being an elder?”
2. “What is my motive for teaching, or preaching, or counseling?”

B. This is not about competence.

1. We all feel we are not cut out for this role.
2. We often hear pastors or elders say, “We feel like quitting every Monday.”
3. However, we must investigate our characteristics by reading 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

C. Analyze and ask if God has gifted you to be a church leader.

1. And if he has, then cherish it and nourish it for the glory of God.
2. Illustration: When I became a traditional pastor after seven years of studies, I thought people came to hear me speak. I soon realized that wasn’t the case.
3. People want to know if you can empathize with them, identify with them and understand them truly.
4. People only listen to those who empathize with them.

VI. Avoiding Unrealistic Expectations from Yourself and Others

A. People’s expectations

1. Find out what people from your church are really expecting. Similarly, do they know what they should be expecting from you?
2. Unclear expectations get us in trouble.
3. Even with our wives, we expect something and they expect something else. How much more those within the church.

B. God’s expectations

1. Paul talks about spiritual gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4.
2. Do you know what your spiritual gifts are?
3. Read about them, find your spiritual gifts and use them for God’s glory and for the building up of his people.

Conclusion

We need to avoid the pitfalls of:

- Avoiding the main issue
- Taking the role of elder lightly
- Unrealistic expectations from yourself and others

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*Detailed Outline
Part 3 of 3*

VII. Avoiding the Reality of Temptations

A. Temptations are common and temptations are pervasive.

1. These can be manifest in many ways.
 - a) Sexual temptation - This is real and pervasive
 - b) Temptation of power and control – The need for power and control over people
 - c) Temptation of popularity and self-promotion
 - d) Temptation of materialism – The need to impress people with money
2. Some of these temptations are subtle and church leaders sometimes are unaware that they have fallen for them.

B. We must be wise in our vulnerability when dealing with temptations.

1. We sometimes have ongoing temptations that we have not shared with anyone.
2. Keeping a secret weakness only increases vulnerability to sin. It is important therefore in turn to be vulnerable to an accountability partner who we can trust and will pray with us.
3. Either way, we have to be wise in vulnerability. We don't open up to any and everybody.
4. Vulnerability is a trust and a must. This is because when we don't share our temptations, we are setting ourselves for failure and addictions.

C. Getting into addiction is gradual.

1. When we lack emotional intimacy, something that we all crave, we run to an addiction.
2. Our intent is that the addiction will provide the emotional intimacy we desire. The truth however, is that it never does.
3. I have found that the real issue is never the addiction but something else. It is important to get to what is really going on in the hearts of people or in our hearts.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:3–4 KJV)

4. There is fellowship going on—the Father and you, Jesus and you.
5. There is also the sharing with each other. It is when this cycle of sharing occurs that joy occurs in the Christian's life.
6. When you are not sharing with the Father and with each other, that is when addictions come knocking. Be careful about the lack of intimacy.
7. Read the book *True Community* by Jerry Bridges for more on this.

VIII. Avoiding the Discipline of the Clock

Spending too much time with the church activities and not with our families

A. Your legacy is with your family and kids.

1. They are the ones you are called to impact first.
2. Not spending time with the family is usually the top complaint among spouses.
3. You might even have to chart yourself so that you don't forget to allocate time for your wife and family.

B. Need for a diversion

1. It is an activity that breaks the rhythm. It may be as simple as chopping or stacking wood.
2. Be on an exercise program. God has made you a physical being and it is important that we are available to God for His glory.

IX. Avoiding the Counsel of Our Wives

A. Part of Our fallenness

1. All men are afraid to listen to our wives.
2. We don't listen because we are afraid they will control us.
3. Illustration: I asked the girls in my class, "How many of you girls will want a husband who is willing to share what they are going through - their depressions, their struggles?" Every girl said that's the type of man they want.
4. Sharing their emotions and hurts with their wives is not easy for men.

B. Stop to listen

1. As elders it is easy for us to tell people what to do but it takes a man to listen.
2. Our ministry is a ministry of listening.
3. God has given us wives so that we will have wisdom and we must cherish that.

Conclusion

We need to avoid the pitfalls of:

- Avoiding the reality of temptations
- Avoiding the discipline of the clock
- Avoiding the counsel of our wives