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RELATIONSHIPS MOVE YOUR MINISTRY

I AM CONVINCED THAT LEADING people is about influencing their lives. Influence is about putting your spiritual brand on and in people. People matter to God. Therefore, people should matter to you.

If your mode of operation comes with the cynical view represented in the following statement, then your influence will be limited dramatically: *“The ministry would be great if it were not for people.”* If you believe that in any level or at any capacity, then you are in for a long, isolated, and lonely ministry journey.

Influencing people in the 21st century will not occur just because of your position, giftedness, style, training, experience, or even success. Influencing people in our generation will come because you have a relationship with them. You must be as personal as possible and create the perception of being a relational leader.

Relationships move your ministry. Relationships build the church. Relationships move the church forward. Relationships move the gospel. Relationships are essential to fulfill the mission.

Love travels on the tracks of a relationship. This means genuine agape love can only happen through having a relationship with others. Since people matter to God and they should matter to you, love is the way you indent their lives. This only comes through having a genuine relationship with them.

In this cynical world where suspicion exists about anyone who is in a place of leadership and influence, having relationships is the only way you can counter this skepticism. Again, this means you must be as personal as possible and create the perception of being a relational leader. This will help limit the influence of skeptics and cynics toward those of us in authority.

MAXIMIZING YOUR INFLUENCE

There are a couple of statements I want to introduce to you that are glaring realities existent today. I hope you will take time to digest them. I want you to meditate on them and I pray you will act on them.

Statement #1: If you are going to influence people toward a common goal, you must have a relationship with them.

You can be the president of Wal-Mart or Microsoft, the head football coach of the University of Texas or the Dallas Cowboys, the president of the United States, the governor of Georgia, or the pastor of Saddleback Church or First Christian of Slippery Rock; however, you will not influence people toward a common goal without having a relationship with them. There is not one leader

or minister in the world who can escape this principle in the 21st century. You must be a person who connects with people.

Some of you are entrusted with the responsibility and blessing of having one staff member on your team or several staff members on your team. Some of you *are* these staff members.

When any of you ask others to join your team or you have been asked to join a team, unite with someone who understands and connects with people. If a person today does not attract and go after people, then that person cannot move others to a common goal.

Could it be that many of our dreams in church fail at this point? Could it be that we just do not want to take the time or make the sacrifices necessary to create, nurture, and build relationships? It takes time, making yourself accessible, and intentionality to do this in life. Maximizing your influence means that you make relationships high on your agenda.

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Statement #2: Ministry leadership is all about relationships.

People will not care about you and the church until they know you care. As you take time to build your relational skills, take time to pray that God gives you genuine care for people. Jesus was moved and overcome with compassion for others. Ministry cannot be heartless and be ministry. Ministry is about people, people, and more people.

If you want to lead them, you have to relate to them. If you want to take them with you toward the fulfillment of taking the good news of Jesus in your region, nation, and world, you are going to have to relate to them. If you want them to support a project or an event of some kind, you are going to have to relate to them. Connecting with people is a part of maximizing your leadership.

The most effective staff players on our staff team are those who understand the power of connecting with others. Their ministries grow and, guess what, people love them. Love is reciprocal. You have to give love via relationships if you want love demonstrated back to you. Maximize your leadership by connecting with others.

PAUL, A PEOPLE CONNECTOR

Have you ever wondered why the apostle Paul was so successful in advancing the gospel? You really should ask that question. If you study it, here is what you find.

Read what Luke says about Paul in the Book of Acts. Read the letters from Paul that he wrote to the churches. Read Romans 16 and, by the way, read slowly. Do not just race through the names he mentions. These names represent real people. Do

not speed past what he says about these people. He is giving you his secret of how he moved the gospel.

Paul advanced the gospel through relationships.

He related to doctors, lawyers, private business people, politicians, plain people, intellectual people, religious people, non-religious people, and influential people, as well as pastors, Christian leaders, and churches. Paul connected with people. He understood the secret of moving and advancing the gospel. He knew it only happened by influencing people.

Paul is so misunderstood by some people. Paul had a heart as big as New York City, even though his message was as narrow as one of the alley streets there. Paul understood people. Paul understood that he could maximize his influence as a Christian leader through relationships. We need to understand and influence people as he did through his heart, passion, and strategy.

LIMITING YOUR INFLUENCE

You limit your influence when you do not relate well to people. This could happen because of bad habits in your life. Family is our school on relationships. Sometimes influence is limited because you are insecure or extremely shy. Other times, it may be limited because of past actions with people that they will just never forget.

You limit your influence when you have no interest in people. I have heard of ministers who are just never accessible to people.

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Some are out the side or back door the moment they step away from the pulpit on Sundays or complete their job responsibilities. Others do nothing to show they are real people themselves. Still others just never care about anyone but themselves.

If this is the way you operate, you are in for one unfulfilling ministry. Your impact will be like a drop of water landing in the Atlantic Ocean. Why in the world are you in ministry if you do not want to relate to people?

A STRATEGIC THOUGHT

Since you are on assignment by Jesus Christ to reach your city, I have a strategic thought for you to consider. I realize the challenge of leadership in a church. I realize what a busy schedule is like. I realize what it is like to go strong for 16–18 hours a day, several days in a row, and still your list is growing. I know you cannot relate to everyone personally, regardless of the size of your church. One thing you must determine is to connect with the people in your fellowship who influence other people.

Here is my strategic thought: *Pray about initiating, developing, nurturing, and maintaining influential relationships that have potential to move the gospel.*

This does not mean that you only relate to a certain kind of person who has a certain kind of influence and happens to have a certain kind of bank account. A minister relates to all people. However, a minister only has so much time with the demands upon his life. Therefore, you need to ensure that the time you spend on relationships is spent influencing others who can help influence the gospel in the greatest way in your region. If you

do not do this, you will limit the advancement of the gospel as well as your leadership.

There are some people in your church you will never engage in advancing the gospel unless you invest in their lives. You may be the only one who can get them to partner with you and your church to take the good news of Jesus to the entire world. Some people will only be equipped by you. Some will only be motivated by you toward spiritual growth. Some will only let you add value to and influence their lives. This is another reality that exists whether you recognize it or not.

Oh, by the way, there are some people in your region that only you can reach for Christ. You can create a relationship with them through a note, a call, a lunch, or just by telling them you want to hear what is going on in

their life. You have watched and appreciated their leadership. Therefore, whether it is 20 minutes or 60 minutes, get to know them. Find common ground. Go slowly. Enter their world first, if you ever want them to enter your world spiritually.

In time, you may have the opportunity at just the right moment to influence them, introducing them to Jesus Christ personally. I have had lunches with business powerbrokers, sports icons, socialites, medical community leaders, real estate developers, politicians, and others, none of whom went to my church.

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To their great surprise, I entered their world, even though they do not operate in my world, and did not ask them for one thing. I just wanted to get to know them. However, I did it because I care about them, the region I have been called to serve and reach, and because I know it is in the heart of Jesus for Ronnie Floyd to relate to other people.

I hope you will consider this strategic thought I have just given to you. I believe it will move the gospel and your ministry beyond your imagination.

IDEAS

I want to give you some ideas to consider in relating to others personally. Some may help create the perception that you are more personal, even though time may not permit you to spend personal time with each person to get to know them.

In the early churches I served, I visited everyone in the church intentionally, strategically, and periodically. I went to several hospitals in one day and the closest was 15 miles away. Yes, I used to spend all day at several hospitals or in the car making all the stops, not once a week, but daily. I even used to know all the people by name. There are days I yearn to return to that life because I love people and want to pastor them personally and genuinely. However, things have changed in my life, in my church, and in our culture. I just cannot be all things to all people. I have only so much time and energy.

Regardless of the size of your church, some of the ideas I want to suggest for you to consider may assist you in moving your ministry and the gospel forward via relationships.

Accessibility

People want to know, “If I called my pastor’s office and needed to talk to him personally, would he talk to me? If I sent him an e-mail, would he read it and respond to it?” People want to know you are accessible. It is always powerful to tell stories of what God is doing in the lives of others. It shows that you are approachable and accessible.

Hang out after church. Jeana and I still go outside on Sunday mornings to greet people following our final service. We love doing it. I tell the people, “I will be in the back if you need to see me.” If we are doing Sunday night church, I hang out down front. Most of the time, Jeana and I are close to the last ones to leave, if not the last ones to leave the worship center. The people know where you are. They know they can come up and talk with you even if they do not. They see you visiting with others or praying with others. Do not let some of the “challenging members” in your congregation dominate that time or discourage you from just hanging out. Expend yourself on Sunday. Your people have limited time just like you do. Invest your Sundays in people while they have more time.

On a typical Sunday, I get up no later than 4:00 a.m. I pray and go over the message for at least 75 minutes. I exercise on Sunday mornings for 40 minutes. Then I go and prepare myself for the day. I am at the church by 7:50 a.m. I then briefly ensure I understand my responsibilities for the day. I retreat to my study for final prayer and preparation for 40 minutes. I walk downstairs at 8:45 a.m. and enter a room where a group of men are already

praying for me. They lay hands on me and pray over me for a few minutes. I walk out and go throughout the worship center for five minutes greeting people. I then conduct the morning services at both campuses.

We usually have lunch with a couple, two or three families, or even a large meeting group. I get home by 2:30 or 3:00 p.m. if I do not have a television or media shoot. I may get a brief nap for quick refreshment. I then prepare myself again for the evening service if we are having it. Following the service, if we are in that season, I will usually go out to dinner with some people before going home. Therefore, Jeana and I may not be home until 9:00 p.m. And yes, I do work on Monday, bright and early.

Why do I want to spend my day off feeling drained? What is my point? Accessibility! My point is also that if you will expend yourself on Sunday, you will gain more time back in the week. Hanging out after services will save you time in correspondence or appointments in the week to come.

Transparency

Many years ago I read an article about the importance of being transparent when you preach. The call was to make yourself vulnerable. The point of the article was that you would only impact people in your communication to the point you were willing to share your personal journey with them of failure, disappointment, struggle, and even victory. I read that article somewhere in some magazine at least 25 years ago. Was it not cutting-edge? Transparency and authenticity is not new today.

The importance of sharing your journey in your communication is critical. Bragging is not acceptable and will be repelled by your people. I am talking about the importance of telling stories about yourself, your family, or experiences, especially when the stories let them see inside of you to see your failures or struggles in the faith. Of course, it is always good when you can laugh at yourself about something stupid you did or even tell a comical experience you had.

I told the story of a skunk one Sunday night at church and the people still talk about it. I told the story in a morning service of being in the worst Colorado blizzard in decades, driving in a rental car where the windshield wipers stopped working, resulting in Nick and me using his shoe laces to operate the windshield wipers manually to keep the ice and snow off of the windshield. He had seen the idea on television. God is sovereign. We did it! Needless to say, the people still talk about it.

If you come across as impersonal in the pulpit because you never let them inside of you and your heart, they will not be impacted by the message itself. Let the illustrations from your life honor God, accentuate a point you are trying to make, and limit talking about your successes or family successes. If you do this with wisdom, you will be believable by others when you communicate.

Technology

Internet technology has created avenues for communication for those of us in the people communication ministry. I use technology continuously.

E-mail has become an outstanding way to communicate with people in my church, on my staff team, as well as people around the world. Be careful and be wise, but it can be a great way to relate to others. Cell phone technology can give you 24/7 e-mail access as well as text messaging, which is huge to children and teenagers.

I would encourage you to collect and continue to collect all of the e-mail addresses of your members. I determined to do this after 9-11. I began doing this because I wanted to be able to have instant communication with our people over national issues or tragedies, as well as unique major church events or experiences in which I want to communicate with them directly and instantaneously. I promised we would not abuse it. I have to sign off for it to be used at all. I want to preserve the power of it so when they get an e-mail from me, it means something and they know it is important.

I began a blog in the fall of 2005. It is called *Between Sundays*. It is designed to share my life between the Sundays. The address is: www.between Sundays.com. Recently, a writer named Terry Wilhite with Rick Warren's "Pastors.com" recognized our blog as the leading blog by a pastor in America due to several of his criteria.

I blog four or five days a week. It takes me 20 minutes or so daily. I talk about family, what is going on in my life, schedule, challenges, and give prayer requests. I may do some lessons (but very few) and devotionalize rarely. I even give predictions on football games periodically. You can read about my grandson, Peyton, and even see updated pictures of him.

It is about the experiences of my life, so the people can get inside of me. Every day is different and will represent to some degree what is happening in my life. That is the point of blogging. My blog started just a couple of weeks before Hurricane Katrina. It gave me instantaneous access to our people, and we mobilized major money toward the disaster, as well as personnel and trips. God can use it in all kinds of ways.

It has been one of the most successful things I have done as a pastor to connect with my people. It makes them feel like they know me. If I blog well, they do know me. They know my heart. They know things about me most would not know.

Yes, blogging can get out of control. We attempt to have a more controlled environment. This website has become the second most popular site of all the ones we have as of now. Unique first-time visitors visit it continually. I am totally against any blog, but especially Christian blogs, where Christians slash other believers. It is ungodly and carnal, very much in violation of Scripture. Yet you can control that occurring, so do not let this discourage you. You will be shocked at the response you get when you announce to your people that you have created a blog.

YOU CAN BE PERSONAL

There are so many ways you can create your life and personality to be personal and authentic. Pray about becoming more relational as a minister. I am confident that Jesus will give you ways far beyond mine that will be appropriate for your personality and leadership style.

Remember: *“Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches. Greet also the church that meets in their home”* (Rom. 16:3–5).