

Ministry as Idolatry/Ministry as Identity

Introduction:

My story: I'm a pastor AND a PK....

Can ministry become idolatrous?

I. Diagnosing the heart.

A. Definitions

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

"In its abstract meanings, 'heart' became the richest biblical term for the totality of man's inner or immaterial nature....The three traditional personality functions of man; emotion, thought, or will."

Kohler & Baumgardner

"One's inner self, seat of feeling and emotions, inclination, disposition, will, reason, the mind in general."

Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon

"Specific reference to inclinations, resolutions, and determinations of the will." "As the seat of the appetites and passions."

B. Diagnosing the heart (Proverbs 20:5)

- When do you tend to experience worry or anxiety?
- What robs you of your joy?
- What do you find yourself seeking to avoid?
- What stirs your anger or causes frustration?
- What dominates your thinking? What does this tell you about the values of your heart?
- What do you fear?
- How do you decide to use your time?
- On what do you choose to spend money?
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C. Diagnosing if a good desire (like serving in ministry) has become an enslaving, inordinate desire.

D. Understanding this as false worship

- This is really about worship/worship—Matthew 12:34-35.

Luther said it well, “A god is that which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing more than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol....That to which our heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.” The Larger Catechism (on the first commandment).

II. Signs of idolatry

Are family priorities right? Is the family being neglected or not properly shepherded? What is going on in family life? Are the husband and wife praying together? Is there time to disciple children? Are family devotions going on? Is there play time with children?

Not a balanced life-what is going on with health? Hobbies?

Here’s my guideline while children were at home and why I had it.

More concerned about Bible exegesis than the Lord of the Bible—what is going on in personal relationship with the Lord?

Is a Sabbath being taken?

III. What could be going on in the heart?

- Success
- Control/power
- People pleasing/prestige

How these lead to problems in other areas of ministry—leadership, conflict, climate in the church.

IV. Addressing the issue

- Repent
- Replacing the false worship with true worship. If false worship is the problem, then true, superior worship is the solution.
- Be brave--ask your wife for feedback
- To whom do you need to ask forgiveness? Consider using the 7 A’s of forgiveness because of their thoroughness.
- Set day off
- Set guidelines to protect family time

- Pursue the Lord not just academics of scripture. Ask yourself, “Am I worshipping the process of studying or the Lord of the process?”
- Remember the Sabbath principle.
- Read devotional literature that feeds the soul. That’s John Piper for me.
- Helping others to see the potential of ministry idolatry (Galatians 6:1-3). Asking questions by reversing roles.

Conclusion:

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