

Don't Touch the Glory

Dear John,

Recently I've been reminded of how wonderful it is to have God's call upon my life. In the church that I serve, we have several young men who have expressed an interest in becoming pastors. Their enthusiasm and adventurous spirit to go forth in the power of the Gospel to change the world takes me back over twenty years when I first felt called to serve God in this way.

Many who start the race of pastoral ministry don't finish the way they expect. They get side tracked by the many hazards that can prevent us from completing the task to which we have been called. I'd like to caution you about one particular hazard that could have destroyed our effectiveness in pastoral ministry.

To give you a little background, I became a Christian when I was 16. My older brother Paul was very instrumental in the process of my conversion. We both became church planters in our early twenties while we were working our way through college and seminary. We had a wonderful plan to see new churches started all over the country which would be effective in bringing the Gospel to our generation. These were days of great vision and believing that God could do the impossible.

However, my desire to serve God often was shadowed by a dark side within me. I was very concerned about being successful. I wasn't completely sure

what success meant, but I knew that's what I wanted in my life. For me, my brother Paul, who is a year older, set the benchmark of what it meant to be successful, and it always seemed to be escalating. My pursuit of this elusive sense of accomplishment led me into many struggles with pride. I have since found out that pride might be the number one struggle that most church planters face. We are torn between the honorable pursuit of serving God and the ugly quest to be seen as successful.

I recently heard some advice given to an up-and-coming pastor in our movement from a pastor near retirement age. He said, *don't touch the glory*. How true. All of the glory needs to go to God, yet all too often we want people to know about our successes.

I can remember times when it became difficult to celebrate the seasons of blessings that others were enjoying. I tried to act like I was happy for them, but I have to confess that I wondered how this made me look. God was doing great things in the ministry He had given me, but I wanted more. I was in the midst of a battle. I really wanted to be godly, yet I fought with this terrible need for self-promotion.

In the early days of our church-planting movement, we hired a very sharp young man named Tom. Tom and his wife Lori had just graduated from seminary and had a passion to see the Gospel shared in our home state of Wisconsin. Tom came to pastor our third church start. My brother Paul and I had made a pact that we wanted each new church plant to do better than the previous. The

problem was that now we were using someone else in this movement. The question arose in my soul: Do I really want to bless Tom with success?

Tom became a great church planter. God blessed his ministry in Whitewater, Wisconsin. My plant in Oshkosh, Wisconsin started six months earlier, thus we were always six months ahead of the Whitewater congregation. Our attendance, offering, and move to our first building took place almost exactly six months ahead of the church he had started.

There was an unspoken competitiveness that existed in my heart toward Tom. He later shared that he felt the same way about me. Although this battle raged inside both of our hearts, we didn't confront and confess this attitude as sin until several years later. It was a day of humbling my heart and asking God and Tom for forgiveness. From that point on, I became a cheerleader for Tom.

Some time later I was given an opportunity to serve on a search committee for a Mission Director for our state. Not only did I recommend Tom, but I tried my best to see that his job description and salary were adequate.

I can't say that I no longer struggle with pride. I think we all do. However, I am now more aware that pride is an incredibly dangerous problem that depletes the leader, rather than building him or her up. As ministers of God, we must purge this attitude from our lives or we will be destroyed by it.

We have been called to serve God. We are not going to be evaluated by Him in comparison to others. Rather, He will hold us accountable for what He has entrusted to each of us. Therefore, we can truly celebrate victories in other

people's lives and ministries and also enjoy the seasons of blessing that God gives us.

Let me give you a postscript to this story, John. Not too long ago, Tom and I were attending the same conference, so we decided to room together. One evening Tom got down on the floor and did fifty pushups. Likewise, I took my turn. When I finished, Tom asked me how many I did. I told him I only had the strength to do forty-nine.

Your co-laborer,

Steve Johnson

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When pride comes, then comes disgrace but with humility comes wisdom.

Proverbs 11:2