



Foundation Stone #1: Intimacy July 2005

“I’m a Minister – Do I Really Need Intimate Friendships?”

Intimacy is a commonly misunderstood word by our culture – ministers included. We talk about intimacy with God without hesitation and understand the concept of intimacy with a spouse. Why is it so difficult to grasp when it comes to friendships? More importantly, why is it so difficult for ministers to create such intimacy?

When people think of “intimacy” with others, most initially assume you’re talking about something sexual. However, sex in marriage is only a picture of what genuine intimacy with another really is – a close relationship of a personal or private nature developed over time. At its core, *intimacy is experienced in any relationship where you know another fully – and where you allow yourself to be fully known.* God created mankind for such intimate community (Genesis 2:18; Galatians 6:2-5). As Divine image bearers, we reflect God’s image as deeply relational beings.

In his book, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, H. B. London, Jr. quotes a statistic claiming that 70% of pastors don’t have someone they would consider a close friend. ***Of the many broken ministers we’ve worked with over the years, one of the more common threads in their stories is a lack of genuinely intimate friendship with others.*** Why are such friendships so difficult for American ministers? Is it also true of you?

Maybe you’re not sure how to go about creating close friendships. Perhaps it was drilled into you as a youngster not to “air your dirty laundry”. As a minister, you may feel it’s not safe to create intimacy with those in your church or ministry due to the risk of “exposure”. The same fear may hold true about becoming too close to other ministers, especially within your own ministry or denomination. Perhaps prejudice or theological differences prevent you from creating such relationships with ministers outside your denomination. Or maybe you simply believe no one would want to know the *real* you.

Ultimately, these are just excuses for neglecting genuine community. As a minister, you need a safe place to take off your mask and be *who you are* rather than always having to “perform” for others. Even married ministers benefit significantly from key same-sex friendships where they can be genuinely understood for the man or woman God created them to be. ***It would only take one or two such friendships to greatly improve the quality of both your life and your ministry.*** Without such a healthy and godly outlet, burnout is often only a matter of time.

Take a calculated risk toward intimate friendships. Your ministry is worth it – and so are you.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- As a minister, do I have anyone I would consider a close friend – someone who knows where I struggle, prays for me specifically in these areas regularly and encourages me when I need it most?
- What excuses do I use for not pursuing biblically intimate friendships?
- What one thing could I do *today* to deepen an existing “surface” friendship toward greater intimacy?

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