



*Foundational Thoughts*  
*March 2006*

## **The Unique Challenges of Ministry**

The Israelites became disgruntled because they wanted a king like the pagan nations around them. Now mind you, it wasn't because they had poor leadership. God had appointed judges over each tribe to rule over the Nation. But the prophet Samuel was old and his sons (appointed as judges) were not godly men. As the people pressed Samuel for a king (I Samuel 8:5), God told Samuel not to take their whining personally because the people's desire for a king was simply a manifestation their wayward hearts were rejecting *God's* leadership.

Israel wanted a physical manifestation of God they could feel and touch. When the Israelites thought they'd lost Moses (yet another God-figure), they felt the need to create a golden image of God to pacify their insecurities – the fear God had abandoned them. There's always been a tendency among God's people to place their trust in the created rather than the Creator in both the Old (Exodus 20:4-6) and New Testaments (Romans 1:21-23).

Wayward hearts plague God's people still today. Ministries place so much trust in (and pressure on) their ministers they sometimes expect them to be like gods. Why do you think they become so upset when you don't measure up to their mark of "perfection?" Why do so many ministry or congregation members leave – not just the organization but their faith altogether – when a minister is exposed for moral indiscretion? It's because they have reduced spiritual faith in God to a mere *religious faith in the minister*. No longer is the minister seen as a human with feet of clay who has a special calling on his or her life to lead or preach the gospel. For these, the minister has become a god, placed high on a pedestal and adored. This is a great danger in ministry.

But that's only half the problem. The average church member places the minister on a high pedestal with expectations to match. Ministers aren't equipped for such lofty expectations. But it's "inappropriate" to admit weakness when others place such trust in you, right? So you shake your head and smile, even though you're fearful of letting them down. You know you don't deserve their accolades, but it *does* make you feel better about yourself – even if it's not quite true. So you redouble your efforts to front a good public image. But such "perfection" requires great effort. To compensate, you unconsciously lower your guard in your private life with your wife, children – and mostly, when you're alone. More and more imperfections surface in your private life. Those closest to you may even comment on your increased moodiness, temper, and lack of presence or energy.

*If you're not getting your innermost needs met in your personal relationship with God and healthy relationships with spouse and close friends, you'll crave praise from those you lead.* This "god complex" is all too common among ministers. You play the role of God in the lives of those to whom you minister when you begin believing what you regularly hear from them. This two-edged sword – expected to *be* God by your congregation and your need to *play* God to meet your self-esteem needs – is part of the fabric of why ministers often fail in ministry.

### **Thoughts to Ponder:**

- To what extent have you let the "good press" you hear from those you lead go to your head?
- What practical steps might help you refocus on key relationships (God, spouse, close friends) for your deeper needs?

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