



Foundation Stone #2: Intimacy September 2007

How Operating Outside of Your Calling Harms Everyone*

Serving outside of our calling will have adverse effects on us, our family and everyone else within our ministry. One day, Moses received a visit from Jethro, his father-in-law. We don't really know, but maybe Moses' wife complained to her dad about how much time Moses spent doing "God stuff" and how little time he spent at home. Like many other busy ministry professionals, perhaps Moses was too exhausted when he arrived home to carry on an intelligent conversation with her. In any case, Jethro vocalized his concern about how exhausted Moses appeared:

What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. . . . Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied. (Exodus 18:17-23)

Like Moses, we can't do it alone. We'll wear ourselves out, and our people will become exhausted too. Our ministry isn't receiving our best if we're spending time working in areas we aren't suited for. We can get others involved in the process by teaching them how to do things. We can then take on the duties only we are equipped to do and let others handle the rest.

Those serving in small ministry settings (especially the single-staffed variety) have to work as generalists and don't have the luxury of specialization. In such cases, lay leadership can and should be developed to fill roles and duties that don't line up with our areas of giftedness. If we're not good at numbers and accounting, we might find a volunteer to keep the books or hire a specialized person from a temp agency for a few hours per month. If the only mouse we're familiar with lives in a hole in the wall, we might search for a layperson to manage the ministry's website. It's not wise to try to do it all by ourselves. Instead, we can pray for God to bring others along to help us and stop feeling guilty for asking others for help.

Working too far outside our calling often leads to potential disaster—both for us and everyone else in our ministry. As emotional trials set in, we will begin resenting our work, our coworkers and our volunteers, eventually leading to frustration, exhaustion and burnout. We may even become self-absorbed and seek relief by entertaining any number of destructive behaviors. It's not worth it.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- In what ways are you *currently* operating outside your capacity and giftedness?
- What *practical steps* might you take to help alleviate this?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Todd Wilson".

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* This article is an excerpt from *Preventing Ministry Failure: A ShepherdCare Guide for Pastors, Ministers, and Other Caregivers* (InterVarsity Press, 2007)