

Being a People Person

By Bill Scheidler

Read Key Scriptures:

Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34:1-31; John 10:7-18; Ephesians 4:7-12

More than anything else, pastors and church leaders are in the people business. One of the greatest and most needed abilities for pastors is the ability to work with people. The effectiveness of the pastor is dependent upon it.

The people skills of the pastor and leaders will have a direct bearing on the leader's ability

- to grow a church,
- to retain people over the long term,
- to raise up and release leaders,
- to work with an eldership and
- to ultimately fulfill the call of God on his or her life as it relates to God's eternal purpose.

People do not have to come to our churches.

A.H. Smith, a former president of the New York Central Railroad once defined his industry this way, "A railroad is 95% men and 5% iron."

Certainly, if this could be said of a railroad, how much more could it be said of the church.

The church is people. Without people there is no church. In the church God cares for people and He accomplishes His purpose through people. As pastors we are in the people business.

Meditate on this for a moment:

- People are the largest single item in most church budgets.
- Most of the planning and ministry centers on the needs and abilities of people.
- The largest and most valuable asset to any church is its people.
- People are the object of at least three-quarters of the pastor's time.

The question is, "Am I a people person?" "Are you a people person?"

You would think that the answer to this question would be obvious. Is it possible to be a pastor and not like people? Is it possible to be a shepherd and not like sheep? Is it possible for people to have a hard time liking us?

Tragically, the answer to all of these questions is "YES!" It is possible to be a pastor and have very weak people skills.

- It is possible to be a mighty in the pulpit, but be puny in the pew.
- It is possible to be strong in the knowledge of God, but be weak in the knowledge of men.
- It is possible to be able to minister to and move the masses, but be unable to minister and to motivate an individual.

Sometimes as leaders it is easy to get our priorities backwards.

Instead of the pastor existing for the sake of the people, we can easily minister as if the people exist for our sakes. Instead of the pastor laying his or her life down for the sheep, the sheep are often expected to lay their life down for the pastor.

It is so easy for leaders to see the people as God's gift to the leadership rather than seeing the leadership as God's gift to the people (e.g. God gave me these people to help me reach my goals or God gave me to this people so that I could help them reach their goals.).

It is easy to function as if the people are given to the pastor so that he or she can fulfill his or her destiny and ministry, instead of acknowledging that the pastors are given to the people so that they can fulfill their destiny and ministry.

Too many pastors and leaders do not have a genuine love for people. They love themselves. They love their call. They love what people can do for them.

Too many pastors and leaders see people *as stepping-stones* to their ministry goals. A person's value is dependent upon what they can do for the pastor, their tithing ability or their political clout. Leaders can easily favor those who can help them achieve personal greatness.

Too many pastors and leaders see people *as problems*. You can often tell that they feel this by the way they refer to specific people. It's the way parents refer to their children when they really don't like children. We refer to them through their problems. Sad to say, sometimes this even comes out in our preaching and teaching.

It appears at times that many pastors and leaders feel that they would have a much easier road if they just didn't have to deal with people!

"I love the church...it's the people that I can't stand!"

Sometimes we wonder why we don't see more love and respect given to us as leaders. But the truth is, often times people's treatment of us is nothing more than a reflection of how we have treated them (much like the husband/wife relationship).

Pastors are called to set the tone. All relationships in the local church will spring out of the relationship that those in leadership have to those who are under them in the Lord. Leaders need to model love in front of the people.

The Apostle Paul was such a good example in this area. As you study his writings you realize that Paul understood his role as a leader and was a true people person. This is evidenced in four main ways:

A. Paul didn't see people as problems, he had a genuine love for others (Phil.1:3-8; 2:26-27).

1. Paul always referred to others as "beloved" (Eph. 6:21; **Phil. 4:1**; Col. 4:9, 14; Phm. 2, 16).

2. Paul wasn't afraid to get close to people and get emotionally involved with them (Phm. 12-13). He refers to Onesimus as “his very heart.”

B. Paul realized a dependence on others, he knew he was not self-sufficient (Phil 2:25; Col. 1:7; 4:7, 10-11; Phm. 2, 11, 17, 24).

1. Paul always had something good to say about people. He did not neglect to compliment them on their strengths (Eph. 1:2; **6:21**; Col. 1:2, 4, 7; 2:5; 4:12-13; Phm. 5, 7).
2. Paul never failed to exalt and acknowledge support ministries even though their role may have been minor (**Phil. 1:1; 2:25, 29-30**; Col. 1:1).
3. Paul depended on the prayers of others (**Phil. 1:19**; Eph. 6:19).
4. Paul never took others for granted, but was always thankful for their contribution to his ministry, and he was faithful to tell them (Phil. 4:14, 18).

C. Paul lived and poured out his life for others (Phil 2:17).

1. Paul spent time in prayer for others (Phil 1:4, 9; **Col. 1:3, 9**; Phm. 4).
2. Paul was willing to make financial sacrifices for others (**Phm. 18-19**).
3. Paul made most decisions in his life on the basis of how it would affect others (**Phil. 1:24-26**; 4:17; Phm. 13-14).

D. Paul was very much concerned about seeing others realize their full potential in God (Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:17).

1. Paul had confidence in others. He trusted them with important missions (Eph. 6:22; Phm. 21).
2. Paul was not afraid to get specific with people if it would help them (Phil. 4:2).

Paul encourages us to have the attitude of Christ when ministering to people (Phil. 2:1-8).

Philippians 2:1-8

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, and any affection and mercy, fulfill by joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being in one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Notice the three “lets”. These three admonitions help us to define three ways of responding to other members of the body and our leadership team.

1. Let each esteem other as better than himself. In other words, you want to be able to look at people and say, “You are more important than I am.”

No member of the body of Christ is more important than another member of the body of Christ. But often we treat them as if they are. How do you treat someone who you view as more important than yourself? That is the way we are to treat everyone.

2. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interests of others. In other words, you want to be able to look at people and say, “I am interested in what you are interested in.”

It isn’t just all about me and my ministry or department. We should be able to see things from the perspective of others.

3. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. In other words, you want to be able to look at people and say, “I am here to serve you.”

There is no pecking order in this church, only servants. We all exist to help the other to be built up and reach destiny.

The way we handle people should continually speak:

- You are loved!
- You are needed!
- You are appreciated!

In the first verses that I read it is apparent that the Lord loves His people and that it is a privilege to be called to serve them. It is also clear that He will hold shepherds accountable for how we ministered to His people. Were we a good shepherd as described in Psalm 23? Or were we a hireling who looked out for himself? Did we feed the sheep? Or did we feed ourselves? Did we use our authority to take advantage of others? Or did we use our authority to bless others?

We need the Great Shepherd to refresh His heart within us. We need Him to come and create a clean heart within us...the heart of a servant, the heart of love for the people of God, the heart that is open and responsive to the Holy Spirit and the needs of others.