

The Spirit Of Pride In The Local Church

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It is amazing to me how easily some saints get lifted up in pride with just a small measure of success. But then again I should not be shocked because many of God's sheep have not developed the daily discipline of time spent in prayer and God's Word. Many have met the Lord in salvation, but have not met His authority, or had their hearts truly smitten.

A senior pastor's job is to empower the saints, to equip them for greater service in the Kingdom of God. But all too often when a senior pastor empowers a church member or an under-leader, that person slowly and subtly becomes puffed up with pride. The devil goes to work on their minds over an extended period of time so they can't recognize what is happening. Then before you know it, they decide to disconnect from the pastor, leave the church, and start their own ministry. A little success has gone to their head. They don't have the internal character to stay connected and remain a team player. The Bible warns about the potential for novices to be lifted up in pride. This is the devil's favorite way to neutralize those with great potential. This is his way of undermining a budding ministry. Divide and conquer!

As a senior pastor I once helped a church member who had a burning desire to feed the hungry in our community. I empowered this person with recognition from the other members, affirmation, and even gave them the idea of how to connect to the needy and make this ministry outreach of our church a huge success. For many months this person was a team player. Newspapers wrote about this outreach many times. The community developed a deep respect for our church because of the food outreach. It was much, much more than just distributing some canned goods. We're talking an entire month's of meals for every family with meats and staples too. Thousands of dollars and food donations came in. But slowly over time I noticed this person started missing church services and became overly engrossed in "their" ministry. Before I knew it, this person had made many of my other members feel that this was the premier ministry of our church and I saw their loyalty shifting. This person wanted my blessing as they left the church and asked for all the appliances like freezers, shelves, etc. be donated to their ministry. I did so reluctantly just to get the schism over with quickly and to protect what was left of the flock. I love this person deeply to this day and wish them the very best.

Another time I made a faithful leader in our church an associate pastor and even let them hold a revival meeting once every week. But over time they got puffed up and decided to hold so-called "evangelistic" meetings nearby in a church member's home. Most who attended came from our church and eventually disconnected entirely from the church. This is deception. But this was also naïve on my part. More church splits, or at least church splinters, occur in the name of "evangelism" than any other excuse! Ha! This person also wanted my blessing as they launched out into "evangelistic ministry" which again I gave reluctantly to prevent a war from breaking out in the church. Besides their mind was already made up to leave. I love and respect this person deeply to this day. But what they did clearly damaged the local church and helped to scatter God's flock... a tragedy with eternal consequences.

Another time, so that we could get a church mortgage on some property, I made a faithful leader "president" of our board of trustees. I appointed others to the board too. I did this, not because I agree with a traditional form of church government, but because the banks don't understand a church government that is more scriptural and apostolic, with the decision-making vested in the founding pastor. Even though I told the new board that we were doing this only to please the banks and the government on our loan applications, it still changed the hearts of those I empowered. Soon they felt they had to critique my every move and wanted to control every financial decision in the church. They began to pick at me and find fault with everything. Each of them eventually abandoned me and refused to bring their accusations to me for discussion face to face, infecting many others too. They refused to tell me the specifics of why they abandoned me and just up and left without explanation or giving me the benefit of the doubt, even after decades of relationship and fellowship together. It eventually decimated that church. But I love and respect each of them deeply to this day. They got tricked by the devil and were used by him, but God is the God of forgiveness and restoration.

The devil is very, very clever in picking off God's choice servants. He will either try to smite the shepherd so as to scatter the flock. Or he will try to work that truth backwards. He will try to scatter the sheep in order to smite the shepherd and stop his Kingdom influence. The enemy of our souls is a master at blowing things out of proportion. Satan likes to give us tunnel vision, making us feel like a temporary crisis is a world-shattering event. He pressures us to take sides on things that don't even require a side be taken. He will try to blow a financial issue out of proportion. He can try to make a simple staff decision that a pastor has to make into an all-out war, where saints draw battle-lines. He specializes in making mole hills into mountains in the minds of people. His name "devil" means "accuser." This is his M.O. He will

place critical thoughts, suspicious thoughts, misunderstanding, and hurt feelings into people's minds and emotions. He will play on people's minds due to information they are not privy to or perhaps should not be privy to. All it takes is one infected sheep to infect many more. The enemy can take one honest mistake (or no mistake at all – just someone's perception or opinion) and make it so offensive to another that they throw away a relationship that was years in the making. Opinions become gods! Differences become irreconcilable in people's minds. They feel spiritual pressure.

What many believers forget is this fact: An under-leader or a saint does indeed have their own anointing, BUT... that under-leader or saint is operating their own ministry under the senior pastor's greater anointing. And thereby much of their success is because of the anointing on the man of God and on the house of God, not them individually. In this fashion God multiplies anointing. God is passionate about order! Doing the right thing out of divine order is still doing the wrong thing. Cases in point: "Uz-Was" in 2 Samuel 6 and the offering of strange fire by Aarons sons in Leviticus 10.

In all the instances I have shared above, each one of these people lost the same measure of success they had before when they operated under my covering, were connected to the house, and served as team players instead of independent. When they left the house and left the man of God they experienced a decrease of anointing on their lives and some even experienced a real leanness in their souls. Thank God, some had the wisdom to at least ask forgiveness later on down the road. Reconciliation is so important to God and so important to our souls that it is worth "eating some crow" and having to humble ourselves. I humbled myself to ask their forgiveness too. I choose downward mobility! Ha! Today the air is cleared between all parties, but the work of God, that local church is gone forever!

Today it seems everyone wants to start their own ministry. Everybody thinks they are called to start a church. Everybody thinks they are called to be a leader. Many think too highly of themselves and should just go ahead and admit, "I have been led by OFFENSE more than I have been led by the Spirit." There are many, many "WANNA-BE's in the body of Christ these days. But there is a vast difference between a WANNA-BE and a CALLED-TO-BE!

It is all too easy for any of us to be led by selfish ambition and false burdens, and to blame it on "God calling me." I venture to say that 70% of what most people say "God is calling me to do it" is simply the voice of their own ambitions, and not God truly leading them.

I suggest these steps to staying broken before God & staying protected from the slow subtleties of the devil:

1. Read your Bible daily to wash your mind. A pure life can only be lived from a pure mind.
2. Pray daily to stay soft before the Lord. Your only defense against the daily rush is a morning hush.
3. Never accuse a church leader without specifics and without multiple witnesses. (1 Timothy 5:19)
4. Go to a pastor first if he has done something that has offended you, not to another church member. (Mat 18:15-17)
5. Don't be quick to abandon any relationship that has been years in the making. Loss is the consequence of hastiness.
6. Don't be more loyal to a blood-kin family member concerning Kingdom and church affairs than you are to your pastor, whom GOD PLACED in your life. All loyalties are to function within their own contexts, not across the board in every other environment. (Numbers 12)
7. Tithe a full tenth of your incomes to your pastor and/or the church. (Hebrews 13:16)
8. If someone has dropped a "bomb" in your lap by sharing some criticism of your pastor or member, DO NOT pledge "confidentiality," but take back your pledge of confidentiality (actually secrecy) they asked you to take at the beginning of the conversation. Go immediately to your pastor to diffuse yourself from what you have heard. The scripture COMMANDS that you give the pastor the benefit of the doubt. This is not a suggestion from the Lord, but a COMMAND!!!! Don't get SECRECY confused with CONFIDENTIALITY. (1 Timothy 5:19)
9. It would not be fair for you to leave that pastor or that church without sharing with him why. Abandonment is almost as serious to God as outright schism and division. (2 Timothy 4:10)
10. Don't place expectations of perfection on your pastor more than you place on yourself.
11. Realize that a shepherd's perspective and a sheep's perspective are different and that this is OK as long as this dynamic is understood and not used by either party to divide and conquer.
12. Understand this: "To dabble with division is to dance with death." God is extremely protective of his local churches. Judgment first begins in the house of God, the Bible declares. Unity is worth preserving at any cost.
13. Ask forgiveness from any spiritual father you have hurt or you feel hurt you in the past, so that you do not drag this spirit into your future Kingdom relationships. Read my short book, "Apostolic Alignment" at www.devotional.net. Don't be so quick to trash a mentor or a spiritual father. Clear the atmosphere. Heal yourself. Heal the body of Christ.