

PREVENTING MINISTRY FAILURE

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In 2003, Wilson and Hoffman began ShepherdCare to help ministers do preventative work to help pastors avoid common pitfalls in ministry. Both men had been working with pastors removed from ministry, and as they sat down and talked together, they discovered seven consistent areas of failure that led to termination of pastors. By learning the major reasons for burnout and moral failure over the past few decades, they've created a model for strengthening and enhancing those in ministry. They call their model "Seven Foundation Stones," and these stones are divided into the following three categories:

Who We Are

1. Intimacy – In God's economy there are three primary venues for genuine biblical intimacy: with God, with others, and with a spouse.
2. Calling – All Christians are called to minister, and a few are called into vocational ministry. Some in ministry today serve under a false calling. Great damage can be done when those who aren't truly called attempt to lead without spiritual empowering.

What We Value

3. Stress Management – Stress is actually the impetus that motivates humans towards accomplishment. It's not the amount of stress we're under that causes problems in our lives. Rather, it's the inability to manage stress that will cause us to call it quits on ministry.
4. Boundaries – Being called to some things necessarily means being not called to others. Boundaries are the tools that help us differentiate the one from the other. Boundaries protect that which matters most to us according to our values.
5. Re-creation – An outgrowth of healthy stress management is the priority of re-creation. Re-creation is supposed to be a purposeful activity to restore and regenerate us so that we can better pursue our calling and intimate relationships. To neglect re-creation is to potentially resign ourselves to a foreshortened tenure in ministry.

How We Relate

6. People Skills – Ministers are called into the people business. Because what we work with most in our vocation is people, it's critical to have excellent people skills. Countless Christian leaders have been removed from ministry due to their deficiency in relating to others.
7. Leadership Skills – Different leadership skills will be required at various stages throughout the ministry years to accomplish what's needed for a particular challenge. Effective leaders are transformative leaders – that is, they are willing to continuously be remade from the inside out by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Reflections

In your time with God over a period of several days, please respond with transparency to the following questions:

1. Intimacy – Connecting to the Heart of Successful Pastoring
 - What words would you use to describe your current relationship with God? How is it different from the way it used to be a year ago?
 - What practices and resources have you tended to turn to in your pursuit of intimacy with God? How are you currently using (or not using) these resources in your regular routine?
 - How would you rate your current level of satisfaction with your practices and resources?
 - How might you improve your overall level of satisfaction?
 - If I asked your spouse on a scale of 1 (ignored) to 10 (well cared for), how much they are feeling cared for by you, what number would your spouse answer with?
 - What changes do you need to make to get it to a 10?
 - Marital intimacy is expressed in five ways: spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social and physical. How in or out of balance is your marriage relationship in these five ways?
 - Which of the five gets too much or too little attention these days? Why do you think this is the case?
 - What same gender Christian friends can you think of who, with a little extra effort, might offer greater intimacy and unconditional acceptance to your life?
 - What would it take to get your relationship with them to that deeper level?
2. Calling – The Power for Effectiveness in Ministry
 - How did you sense God initiating your call into ministry?
 - Has that sense of God's call increased, decreased or stayed the same? Why?
 - In what ways are you currently operating outside of your capacity and giftedness?
 - What practical steps might you take to alleviate this?
3. Stress Management – Avoiding Ineffectiveness and Burnout
 - What circumstances are causing the most stress for you right now? Consider things from all areas of your life including ministry, marriage, children, community, family, finances, health, friendships, etc.
 - Would you rate your current stress level as low, moderate or high?
 - Think back over the last twelve months. Has your level of stress increased, decreased or stayed the same?
 - Would your spouse or a close ministry friend have the same perception of your stress levels as you answered in the previous two questions? What's one thing that you could change about your current lifestyle that might decrease your stress level? Be specific.

4. Boundaries – Protecting What Matters Most

- What area of your life might benefit from becoming more boundaried? Describe what becoming well boundaried in this area might look like.
- Think back on an interaction with someone who challenged your freedom to minister in a way consistent with who God calls you to be. In what way did you respond?
- How might you have responded differently to achieve a result more in line with your values and calling?
- How much vacation time are you allowed each year? How much did you use this last year?
- What time and financial resources does your ministry make available to you for professional conferences or renewal? How might you take advantage of these resources in the next year?
- What feedback (verbal and non-verbal) have you received from your family or close friends related to your boundaries or lack of boundaries with work?
- What adjustments might you consider to promote change in this area?
- How can you plan ahead in the coming year to protect important time with your family?
- What modifications do you need to consider in the way you interact with the opposite sex to protect you from sexual temptation?

5. Re-Creation – The Fuel to Reenergize Ministry

- How much “down time” do you have planned into your regular routine?
- What do you do for fun? What are your hobbies? How often do you participate in them?
- What excuses do you use for not prioritizing re-creation?

6. People Skills – Managing Our Most Valuable Resource

- Which of your relationships are most in need of repair or proactive maintenance? List names here.
- How much do personality differences play a role in your conflict? Be specific.
- What’s one thing you can do with each of the relationships you listed above to move towards repair in the next three months?

7. Leadership Skills – Setting Ministers Apart from the Rest of the Sheep

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in your life that may presently lack integrity.
- What steps might you take to restore integrity to these areas?
- Are there any areas where your talk doesn’t match your walk in leadership? Be specific.
- What changes could you make to model more authentically what you ask of others? Be specific.

Conclusion

The above seven foundation stones are what Wilson and Hoffman claim are necessary to build a solid ministry that keeps from crumbling. If you had to give yourself a letter grade on each of the seven foundation stones, what would that grade be? What can you do to shore up any of the foundation stones that receive a C grade or lower? Spend some time during a personal retreat day praying over each of the seven foundation stones and giving some thought to a self-care plan in the areas you graded yourself lowest. Then share some of your insights with a trusted prayer partner.