

MAGNOLIA MINDS: Holy friendships are the best

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Reed

Early on a Monday morning, I made my weekly commute to seminary. It was my second semester at the extension center in Clinton, and I had made very few connections with any student or professor there. To make matters more challenging, my Mondays from there until what seemed like eternity would begin with trying my best to learn Biblical Hebrew.

I arrived a little early, made my way to the classroom, and found a seat in the back of the class. As I took one last look at my vocabulary for the day, I couldn't help eavesdropping on the group of guys sitting next to me.

They seemed like a tight-knit group of friends. Something that, quite frankly, I had not had since college. It had been a few years since my wife and I had even spent time with other people our age. At the time, most 23-year-olds weren't pastoring churches or in the same stage of life as we were. We weren't exactly miserable, but something was definitely missing.

As the time inched closer to the start of class, one of the guys asked me a question. As we began a conversation, we realized we had a few things in common. Then he said it. One

of the most significant invitations I ever received was in the back of a Hebrew classroom seconds before a vocabulary quiz: "Why don't you join us for lunch?"

That invitation to lunch became an invitation to a friend group formed and fashioned every Monday around Hebrew classes, cups of coffee, and Zaxby's fried chicken. Seldom has a week passed without sharing my life with these friends. These friends and a few others I've met along the way have convinced me that pastors need deep and godly friendships in order to have impactful ministries.

Unfortunately, pastors often do not open themselves up to friendships for many reasons. We often do not want to be vulnerable, open ourselves up to rejection or pain, or may not believe we have the time. I want to give you three reasons why friendship is worth the investment.

Mile Wide, Inch Deep

Most pastors seek to make sure that no one would categorize their teaching as, "a mile wide and an inch deep," but we are often guilty of having friendships that are. It's tempting to fall into the pattern of the world and try to meet as many acquaintances as we can for "networking," but this often creates shallow relationships and offers shallow rewards.

Deep friendships are not about what you can do for me; instead, they are a sharing of our very selves with those God has placed around us. It's through these friendships that God gave me that I grew, and still grow, in my faith.

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My pastoral heroes are the friends God placed around me when I started pastoring my first church. God uses deep friendships

to sanctify us, comfort us, and embolden us to fulfill our ministry. What becomes of the Apostle Paul without Barnabas, or Luther without Melancthon, or William Carey without Andrew Fuller?

We must seek friendships that grow us spiritually, not just friendships that help us climb the ladder.

Accountability

One thing acquaintances can't do is tell you when you're being dumb. Well, I guess they can but it's often not well received. True friends, however, can speak hard truths into our lives in a way that is well received and transformational.

Sadly, the larger evangelical church has seen many leaders fall in recent years because of moral failings. Whenever something like that occurs, I am always tempted to ask, "Where were his friends?" We must allow godly people into our lives that can identify destructive behavior in us and help us to kill it before it kills us.

Satan desires nothing more than to alienate every pastor, silo him off, and destroy his ministry. Genuine friendships act as a safeguard for all believers, especially pastors.

God's Good Design

Finally, friendship is a part of God's good design for humanity. God himself is the source of friendship. Each person of the Godhead perfectly loves the others and that love extends to us, not just to privilege us but to be shared amongst each other.

Not only did God create us to relate deeply to one another, but he divinely orchestrates who will be in our lives. The author C. S. Lewis reminds us, "For a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work... The friendship is not a reward for our

discriminating and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others.”

It is within godly friendships that we see the love of God reflected. As we learn more about each other, we learn more about Him. Deep friendship is a blessing and one for which many pastors long in difficult locations. Let us not take these relationships for granted.

Whether it's around a lunch table or an association table, friendship is a beautiful gift. Determine to pray for your pastor to have deep friendships and, if you're a pastor, determine to be a friend to those around you.

After all, is not Jesus the friend that sticks closer than a brother?

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