



**BIVOCATIONAL & SMALL CHURCH
LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

BSCN LEADERSHIP SERIES

**MAINTAINING HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIPS AS A MINISTER**

It's a must to exist, excel, and enjoy life as a minister.

By D. Tony Rankin
Therapist, Speaker, Author

The foundation to maintaining healthy relationships starts with maintaining balance, being true to yourself, learning how to be transparent and open to learning new truths about yourself, setting boundaries, and relying on God instead of thinking you know everything and believing in your own efforts.

- Balance – Say “Enough is enough” or “I don’t have to be on 24/7” more often. One of the difficult things for ministers to tackle and understand is the need for balance. The need to please people, God, and self constantly demands that the minister maintain a pace that no human being can keep. This social, spiritual, and personal codependency disallows room for error, normalcy, and relaxation. Bivocational ministries complicate this because rarely is the individual working 40 hours a week or does he feel like he can ask for leniency or slack from either one of his bosses. Ideally a person should not work more than 56 hours a week in order to maintain health and balance. This number of hours includes employment, housework, and chores. There is life after the job!
- Personal honesty – Learn to live with yourself. Stop trying to fool everybody in the world that you are somebody you are not. Avoid lying to cover up a mistake or to convince others that you are bigger than life. Knowing who you are and allowing others to know the true you will give you the personal freedom to be ordinary and acceptable and in turn will give others the opportunity to accept themselves, too. If you forget to do something, admit it. When you make a mistake, own it. When you have an opinion, don’t cover it up when you are worried about how you will be perceived. Be true to yourself.
- Transparency – Leave every conversation, meeting, worship service, and encounter with others with something to think about. Transparency is the willingness to let others look into who you are and what you feel. One of the issues in mediocre and failing relationships is that there is a lack of depth and insight as to how other people think. Interestingly though, people gasp for air when they encounter another individual who is vulnerable enough to believe in himself while risking

- what others feel about him. This is not an encouragement for arrogance, insensitivity, or rudeness. Instead it is an invitation to be known and to encourage others to be known as well.
- Boundaries – Know how to protect yourself. Ministers are likeable, targets for being taken advantage of, and poor at setting limits. Take care of your time, your family’s need for some privacy, and your personal integrity. Knowing where you begin and end and where others begin will help you in not being used, worn out by others, and exhausted by your schedule and expectations.
 - God – Know that He is your refuge, strength, courage, and help. Psalm 46 reminds us that only with God’s protection and His power can we continue successfully to help others, bring about healing, have appropriate relationships, enjoy life, and find direction in our lives.

What relationships do you have?

SELF

Great expectations. Doctors, lawyers, and clergy have more problems with drug abuse, alcoholism, and suicide than the community realizes. Research suggests that 25 years ago the minister dealt with burnout better than most professionals. Today 75% of ministers express extraordinarily high levels of anguish, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.

Help! I’m exhausted!! Finding balance can be like walking on a tight rope with a chain saw. If you haven’t faced the struggle of stress or burnout in your job, you will. If you have experienced the horrifying impact of confusion on your ministry (and have lived to tell about it) you can attest to the implications to not only your work, but your family and personal life as well. If you are in the middle of exhaustion take a few deep breaths and listen to those around you who have survived, and then trust their advice. Here are a few things that can impact you.

- ***Compassion Fatigue***

Often ministers think they are experiencing work related burnout when in reality they are experiencing compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is a result of deeply caring for an individual or a group of persons by trying to affect change or take care of their hurts, traumas, and difficulties. After a while you may begin to be impacted by their pains and struggles to the extent that you are less compassionate over time. This may be a result of being overwhelmed with the emotional energy it requires over time to be such a caretaker. It may be due to the lack of recognition and the little reward in helping hurting persons. It more than likely includes the lack of professional support and encouragement you don't get because of the line of work ministers are in. Start out by taking a brief survey online to see how much compassion fatigue, job dissatisfaction, or burnout you have.

Take the online test at www.compassionfatigue.org

- ***Performance Trap***

Oftentimes ministers become like actors and constantly feel like they are on stage. Trying to perform when it's not your real self, play a role because certain aspects are expected of you by the congregation, or act as if you've got it all together because you think that's what the community wants will all have a negative impact on your physical and spiritual health, your relationship with everybody listed above, and in a hugely negative sense with yourself.

Realize you are not the expert. This will allow you to decrease your intensity. Understand that intensity does not equal productivity or value. It only means you are trying to prove something to yourself. Consider every behavior and reaction as a symptom of something.

- ***Perfectionism***

You may have never heard this said before, "Being a perfectionist is not a good thing!" For years professionals in all walks of life have worked harder and more efficiently in order to become more successful and recognized in their field of expertise. Unfortunately over time, upper management, bosses, church personnel committees, and deacon/elder bodies have become less concerned about excellence

and have come to expect quantity of hours instead of quality of work. But people have continued to strive toward perfectionism, which now is more of an indication of anxiety. Perfectionism is no more than a cover for anxiousness over doing and pleasing others enough and escaping the fear of not being good enough in an individual's personal opinion as well.

When you start to feel that urge to be perfect, take a look at what issue is driving you toward anxiety and worry. Address it and make changes before it begins to dictate your schedule, increase your anxiety, or ruin your relationships.

Another way to address anxiety is to seek personal renewal all year long instead of waiting until you get to a point of desperation. Find ways to take care of your spiritual needs before you become emotionally spent and are incapable of helping others.

OTHERS

The scriptures speak about “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). The difficult part of that is “others.” You can't control what they do and you can't reciprocate negatively to them because they don't treat you right. That's not what the verse says. When you live and dwell in their negativity or anticipate failing in the eyes of those who figuratively wear a black veil, it often breeds hostility, resentment, and ineffectiveness in the pulpit and in ministry.

One of the toughest things that ministers struggle with when it comes to relating to others is allowing them to “do unto you” when it is positive and meaningful. Accepting their graciousness and kindness may seem awkward at times, but not accepting their kind words or offers to take you out to eat or do a task for you disallows them to express themselves in a compassionate way.

OTHER MINISTERS

Ministers often use the excuse that they are too busy to meet with other ministers in the area, but unfortunately that may not be the real reason. There is a possibility that it is related to jealousy of their style, charisma, congregation size, salary, or personal belongings. What would happen if they made the same choices or were like you? Remaining isolated, arrogant, or judgmental will make relationships strained and unwanted. Be glad you know them and encourage them and their church. Most communities have enough unchurched persons in the neighborhood that need to be cared for rather than being in competition for the members who are already active somewhere.

Meet and hang out with each other. Plan a regular time to get together for prayer, meals, tennis or golf, studying, and looking at ways to connect more people with the church.

FAMILY

Be intimately close with every family member. If you have children or grandchildren, find ways to not only know details about their lives but spend time with them talking about what's going on with their day(s). Regardless of how old they are, ask them about their day, interests, relationships, successes and failures, happiness, sadness, anger, confusions, and anything that is of interest to them. Know them and allow them to know you, too.

Pursue your children regardless of how old they are. Children of all ages want to know that their parents care, are interested, and are proud of them. If they are a preschooler admire their art, get excited when they learn a new word or skill, and let them crawl in your lap. If they are in school ask about what they are learning, inquire about who their friends are without being judgmental, let them ask the strange and tough questions, and find out their likes and dislikes of everything including school, friends, home, and church. Don't try to fix anything or get nose. Just listen and be interested. If they are

adults of any age, still pursue them. Call them and ask about their day, job, accomplishments, worries, and struggles. Regardless of the age, children want to be sought after.

Take a look at whether or not your work at the church has become an addiction. Consider whether or not it is a form of medication. Too often ministers don't realize that the drug of choice for an escape or to feel better is their work. The impacts of workaholics are not too different from other addictive personalities. Some of the hurdles of being a minister's son or daughter include:

- Be perfect
- Be involved at church
- Be a model student
- Stay in a good mood
- Like everything at the church
- Be willing to work 40 hours a week for the church
- Know the Bible
- Be a performer
- Be willing to keep the lineage going
- Understand parents' frustrations

SPOUSE

As a minister, you can be the example to others who watch you and provide healthy, ordinary, and realistic relationships with your spouse. So far everything you have read has said be authentic and not on stage. One of the inescapable realities as a minister is that you are the Shepherd of the congregation, lighthouse on the hill, and a real guy everybody looks to. Accepting and acknowledging your role as minister permits everybody to see the reality of being married and being happy in the good times and working through the more difficult ones.

When you and your wife discuss her feelings about being a minister's wife and address the expectations she has in the relationship, listen to her and believe the list. You may not agree with everything she is saying to you, but do your best to empathize and understand it is what she wants. This will indicate that you are listening and care about her thoughts and feelings. Do more than just nod your head,

“Yes dear,” but actively listen to her and repeat back to her just as you would when ordering food at a fast food restaurant.

Generally time away from the house and family is a significant issue for ministers’ families. There is no easy fix when you are dealing with the demands of people with crises and needs, but you do have to be sensitive to the needs and expectations of your own family, too. Talking about the awareness you have of your absence due to church work and ministry will go a long way in helping your family know you care. Try using an idea called time equity. In other words, figure out your normal schedule related to church and then any extra time that it and the demands of others that takes you away from your ordinary family time, then give that same amount of time back to your family – minute for minute would be ideal!

CHURCH MEMBERS

Love those who drive us crazy. You may not know everything that is going on with them and can’t fully understand what’s behind their reactions. Identify what it is about them that annoys, angers, confuses, or frustrates you. You can’t fix them but you can be aware of what you are thinking about or struggling with. Try to be friendly and avoid being critical, condescending, and embittered toward them. Look for ways to connect that are pleasant. You are their minister and must set an example for them to follow. If necessary set limits and let them know when their demands or requests just can’t be met.

The most difficult member may be the one who has given you the kiss of betrayal. You may feel that they have broken a trust in the relationship or they said something about you that is untrue or mean. Sometimes the words may be an attack on your integrity, personality, or family.

Accept the persons that want to embrace your work and pour your life into them and allow them to respond to you in positive ways in return. Christ demonstrated this for you. He loved everybody and attempted to connect with all persons. He got particularly close to the ones who followed Him and wanted to be a part of His ministry. That wasn’t everybody, by the way!

STRANGERS OR THE PUBLIC

Everywhere you go you encounter persons you relate to. Some are intimate friends, some are casual acquaintances, and some seem like enemies, while others are strangers. It's so easy for the minister to get caught up in his world of busyness, priorities, church work, and his own selfish desires that he neglects the very persons he needs to encounter. Whether they are consequential strangers or people you know in the community, they need you and you need them.

Ask yourself, "Why do I cross to the other side of the road?" (There's a pretty good story in the gospels about this!) Is it because of skin color? We live in a world that claims to be about equality and free of racism but too often this is not the case. Look at the news and listen to and look at the discrimination in your church or the neighborhood. Too busy and don't have enough time? You may have too much planned in your day but you have the same amount of hours as everybody else, it's just a matter of how you spend them. Too often the church work gets in the way of helping others, serving, and ministering to those in need. You may need to evaluate how you organize your time. Setting priorities and letting go of some of the less significant tasks may help. Take a look at your schedule and see how little of your time is spent on truly encountering the hurting and needy person.

Sometimes we choose not to minister because the other person can't do anything for you or the church. Be careful. Our serving and ministering to only those that can return the favor, hold a church position, or give financial support is not only wrong, but a poisonous, codependent way of relating. We are to serve and love others, period, not expecting anything in return. Maybe the stranger is not loveable or easy to love. Whether it's their attitude, last name, smell, socio-economic class, or past, the lovability should not be a criterion for whether or not we have meaningful interactions with them.

Who is your brother? Church members and your community. The loveable and the likeable ones, too. Often relating to someone you barely know, or may not know at all, can potentially be a life changing moment for you and him, or her. Loving deeply will include being honest, spending time with, assisting them when they need help, being trustworthy and trusting, listening to them, and including them in your story.

So Now What?

Relationships require trust, sharing and keeping secrets, communication and shared decisions. Research indicates that we trust less in every area of our life.

Here are some big things to consider:

- Take risks with others by knowing and being known.
- As you make choices about how to respond to everyone you relate to, ask if your response or their opinion matters to you.
- Listen without judgment.
- Be intentional.
- Be transparent.

You may be the first and last person to hear somebody's story.

Relating to others matters!



CONTRIBUTOR BIO:

D. Tony Rankin is a clinical therapist, speaker, author, husband, father, and grandfather. He has spent the last 24 years in private practice addressing the needs of families, couples, and individuals who struggle with relationship issues, marriage conflict, parenting, trauma, anxiety and mood disorders, and dissatisfaction with life. He speaks at churches, corporations, schools, and civic groups on these topics as well. Prior to 1991 he was a Minister to Youth and Children in Nashville, TN. He has published over 300 articles for magazines and newspapers, written eight books, and answers crisis calls for youth camps, churches, and businesses all across America. He has been married for 33 years and has three adult children, one daughter-in-law, and a grandson. He loves to collect baseball memorabilia and walk.



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**PO BOX 111744
NASHVILLE, TN 37222-1744**

**WWW.BSCLN.NET
615-490-3107**