



WHO IS THE MAN *in your life?*

By Al Ells, M.C.

A recent elk-hunting trip in northern New Mexico unexpectedly became a week of counseling and prayer. Our hunting guide turned out to be a minister. He and his wife had fasted and prayed for 21 days, asking the Lord to provide them with counsel and direction for their lives and ministry. My partner and I didn't get an elk, but we did gain a friend in ministry and renewed vision.

“Who do you go to when you need help and direction?” he asked. He told us he had tried and failed to build meaningful connections with fellow

pastors. He was not alone in this problem: A 1991 Fuller Institute study showed that 70 percent of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend. Focus on the Family surveys indicate that “most members of the clergy feel isolated, insecure, and only rarely affirmed.”

I used to feel isolated like so many other pastors, but over the years, I have been blessed with close relationships with other men. These men believe in me, encourage me and also correct me when I need it. What a blessing! I could not have weathered my seasons of difficulty without them.

A pastor's success in ministry may hinge on whether or not he can establish such a relationship. Consider the following “man-in-your-life” principles to help you evaluate where you stand in developing an important peer connection. These principles also apply to women in ministry.

The “man in your life” should...

...be someone other than your spouse

A healthy marriage is essential for a pastor: a spouse is there to listen, provide love and support. However, when objectivity and perspective are of utmost importance, a spouse is not always the best resource. Marital dynamics naturally color opinions, and having a trusted peer to turn to will prove helpful.

...rarely be someone in your congregation or ministry

Many pastors have befriended members of their congregation only to be betrayed by them later. It is difficult for many congregational members to separate the pastor as a position from the pastor as a person. It is better to reach outside your own church body for close friendships to avoid these hurtful, damaging situations.

...should not be a member of the opposite sex

The risk of creating an ungodly emotional or sexual connection is far too high. What begins as a platonic friendship can quickly lead to infatuation and sexual misconduct.

Typically, an affair starts when a man shares his burdens, and receives solace, attention, respect and affirmation from a woman other than his wife. Likewise, women are most vulnerable when sharing feelings and receiving back compliments from a man, even (perhaps especially) if they are for her work in ministry. These types of situations have the potential to rapidly spiral out of control.

Note: Thirty-seven percent of surveyed ministers confess to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.

...encourage you in God

Get rid of “friends” who tell you what you want to hear instead of what you need to hear. Such flatterers do so for their own advantage (Jude 1:16). Example: David and Jonathan. David had been on the run from Saul, who was trying to kill him. Jonathan (Saul’s son, no less) found David hiding at Horesh and gave him words of godly encouragement (I Samuel 23:16). God’s perspective is always best no matter what our flesh demands.

...open, understanding and supportive | Proverbs 15:31-33, Ephesians 4:15, 25)

The purpose of the relationship is not to tell the other person how great you are, but rather to expose your heart. Be vulnerable. Share your weaknesses, doubts, insecurities,

struggles and fears. We all have them. God will use your friend to help you, thereby strengthening you for His work.

A few more tips...

Be purposeful about pursuing friendships

“A man who has many friends must show himself friendly,” according to Proverbs 18:24. Activity and exposure are the two keys to friendship, especially for men. Men bond by doing, while women bond by talking. Pastors must actively pursue friendships, and invest time in them to reap the rewards of deep, trusting relationships.

Cultivate at least one relationship with an older man or woman of God

There is no substitute for the life experiences gained through walking with God over time. Our “fathers” and “mothers” in Christ possess great wisdom and perspective, and we as children in faith can tap into that wisdom. One of my close friends is an older man who has witnessed the rise and fall of various men and women of God. He continually anchors me in the truth, for instance, the importance of admitting and repenting of my sins as we are taught in 1 John 1:8-10.

Pray for the “man in your life” (Matthew 21:22)

The best way to connect with others is to pray for God to provide you with relationships. The elk-hunting minister in New Mexico prayed that God would provide him with input, guidance and a relationship. God faithfully answered. Also, pray for the man God puts in your life and that your relationship will remain godly and fulfill God’s purposes.