

The Secret, Invisible Influence of a Home Pastor: “The Power of Prevention” or “You’ll Never Know”

It’s easy to become discouraged or frustrated in the course of shepherding people. **Probably the two main discouragements are 1) when people sin or act foolishly causing pain and breakdown [commoner in more youthful groups] and 2) the dreary lack of progress [more common in groups with older folks]. We’re going to focus on 2) seemingly slow or non-existent growth or change in the people you are ministering among.**

The problem: pastors get frustrated because our people don’t grow as quickly or uniformly as you want.

Frustration is normal. Anyone ministering to people for any length of time is subject to frustration. It’s in the job description. **(All people-intensive vocations, coaching, parenting, running a company, are subject to exasperation.) Every pastor goes through times where it seems like you’re making little difference, or people are complacent, or they only grow when forced to by pain and stress. We are trying to get people to do what they need to do in order to become what they want to become. Any sports coach or physical trainer knows that’s not always easy.**

But we know that people really don’t grow at in inclined plane; steady, constant. We tend to grow in spurts, with long periods of mundane life filling the spaces between growing periods.

This is why you should not run from crisis, conflict, and trauma. We need to learn to, if not welcome them, at least recognize these events as potential growth opportunities. Crisis break the sleepy rhythms of life and have the potential to awaken people to their true condition so they can grow. For instance people generally think more highly of themselves and their ability to resist temptation than they really ought. When they fall to a grimy or unflattering sin- they become aware of their true spiritual condition and can have a life-changing wakeup call with Jesus.

When boring is good

It’s always great when you see someone really getting it, or making outstanding progress in Christ. It’s rewarding for them and for you, their pastor. But fruitful, mature lives are generally mundane, not dramatic. **In fact, life is supposed to be mundane. I know that sounds strange when you live in a hedonistic culture where pleasure and excitement are the highest values. But** all the important virtues- loyalty, constancy, covenant faithfulness, dependability- create a predictability and routine. It’s the predictable people that everyone counts on when you need anything done in life. But when a person’s life is always full of drama, it’s often a reflection of

their personal instability and immaturity. Sin brings lots of drama and excitement. Instead, it's our goal to help people toward predictable, mundane, one-foot-in-front-of-the-other success.

1 Timothy 1:5 the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

When we are teaching and leading discussion in our groups- our goal is not something that looks particularly dramatic and exciting on the outside. In fact, a home pastor that is effectively

1 Peter 3:4 Let [your beauty come] from the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

God greatly values a woman with a gentle and quiet spirit. A gentle and quiet spirit is by definition quiet, predictable, constant, dependable. It's not dramatic or even very visible. **In fact,**

For instance: we teach men to love their wife and kids by the mundane act of getting up every day and trudging off to work (even if it's a job they don't like, or don't feel is rewarding). We teach them to be faithful to their wife, to have eyes for her alone (even if would be more exciting to trade her in for a younger model). We teach him to establish a routine of fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. Good men who marry good women who raise (lots of) good kids are the ones who change the world (not necessarily through protest marches and revolutions but) by joining together with likeminded others to forge the kind of society that God can bless and give dominion to.

So, virtue often seems mundane and predictable. And it's true. You can always predict what a good man will do. He will do the right thing. He won't go off half-cocked and do something hare-brained and stupid, that he'll pay for the next 20 years. We are trying to produce predictable men and women in our home fellowships. They will always do what pleases God because they are covenant-keepers; faithful, loyal, and dependable.

But in the same way that people don't usually just suddenly start engaging in serious sin- they got there slowly, bit by bit, with small compromises and deceptions over time- and eventually they think, "what have I done? How did I end up here?" in the same way righteousness doesn't usually manifest in someone's life all of a sudden – with a dramatic bolt of blue from heaven. People slowly, bit by bit, line upon line, grow in God until they realize, "I've really changed. I'm different. That temptation doesn't even bother me any more." But the process of transformation is not usually dramatic. In fact, it's mundane. But it's how people change- slowly!

So, if you find that you are bored with your home group- check to see if it's the good kind of boring. Perhaps your expectations need adjusting. Boring is not by any means always bad.

So, It's common to become discouraged at a seeming lack of exciting, outward signs of growth in your home group. It can seem like you're not doing much good. And that's because growth is generally incremental and slow.

But another reason for discouragement is that a lot of the effect we have in people's life is invisible to us. We can't see it.

The Home Pastor's Invisible Hand

But there is probably a lot more going on than you realize in your home group. What you do is vital to the spiritual health of your people and to the spiritual health of the church for a variety of reasons you may be unaware of:

You are doing a very good thing even if ALL you do is hold things together. If all you do is give people a place where they can come in and rest and refit among fellow believers- that is good! They need it. Let's see some of the reasons why:

- 1. You provide an environment where people are regularly encouraged, challenged, and supported in the faith** (whether they fully appreciate it or not) every single week. This weekly support creates a barrier or a bulkhead against temptation, foolish thinking, and destructive actions.

Hebrews 10:23-25 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

For instance: if people are left to their own devices, without any challenge or support, they often drift into sin and do stupid things. It doesn't happen all at once; it's not like if they miss home fellowship for two weeks you'll find them in the restroom at the Texaco station with a hooker shooting up heroin. Instead, Without mutual support and challenge, people quite naturally grow dull to the love and the fear of God. Deception or compromise can set in, small at first, deepen over time, until they do things that they never thought they were capable of. **Being in a home group really helps people: Few of the crisis and breakdown situations that cross my path are occurring in the lives of people who belong to a home group and faithfully attend. They either don't belong in one or have long lapsed their attendance.**

Your home group provides a much needed sanctuary that provokes people to love and good works and bolsters their desire to live godly lives.

But listen- you will probably never know it! I think this is where some of the frustration and discouragement comes from. You can not see a lot of the good you do in people's lives. And

people themselves are not very good at diagnosing the causes of ANYTHING in their life! Including the contributions you are making as their home pastor! Even more, you can't know what DIDN'T happen because of your godly influence. Which leads us to #2...

2. You are a sin-prevention agent in the hands of God. even if ALL you do is hold things together

It is far better to prevent a disease in the first place than to treat a disease that you have already acquired. Doubly true for sin. All sorts of little sins and flaws can grow and establish themselves over the years, which if not pruned off, will end up drastically affecting a person's life. Your teaching and example and the godly environment of your home group act as a preventative to ungodliness and sin.

You will never know that a guy quit smoking, and so added 15 years to his life, and there by left an excellent godly legacy to his grandchildren. The same sort of thing is true for the guy at your home group who, in a moment of financial pressure is considering writing himself a couple checks out of the company procurement funds. Nobody will know. But at home group, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he decides he's not that kind of man. But without the home group, he does it again and again until it's a felony offense that ruins his employment record and his ability to get jobs in the future. Without your encouragement and teaching about obeying God and embracing repentance, none of that would've been possible. Of course you will seldom find out about someone dodging a bullet because of your influence. Even *they* don't put all the pieces together for themselves. but while this this effect of sin-prevention is generally invisible to us, it's absolutely crucial to what we pastors do.

Never underestimate the power of prevention:

James 5:20 he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

That is why we:

2 Timothy 4: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

When we warn our people against sin we are creating a social pressure that helps them tend toward godly living. We are preventing disasters. But it is mostly invisible. You can't see it occurring.

But we don't merely teach against sinning. That's good. But incomplete. We must also direct them toward righteousness.

3. You are creating a refuge of righteousness (even if you see few dramatic transformations or events)

It can be hard to live righteously in a gross, wicked, faithless society. A reprobate society wears people out and breaks down their righteous resolve. But your home group is an outpost of God's kingdom where righteousness, courage, holiness, faithfulness, etc., are all encouraged and applauded. Even if no one ever gets saved, or there are no healings, or you never cast out a single demon in the home group- by honoring the word of God, praying for each other, and reinforcing the truth- you strengthen people in the faith so they can fight on.

For instance: at work, men constantly hear derogatory and contemptuous statements about marriage and wives. But at home group, they are in an environment where faithfulness, constancy, and loyalty are celebrated and rewarded. Their marriage is enriched and strengthened - even if you don't directly talk about marriages- just by being around people like you- people who value and esteem marriage.

For instance: In our society, women are encouraged to see themselves as morally superior to men. In fact they are encouraged to see themselves as superior to men in every way. Feminism says, "Men suffer from testosterone poisoning: and are therefore responsible for virtually all the problems of the world." TV and movies tend to denigrate men and traditional, godly roles. But at home group women are reminded that there really are good men in the world and that God's design for male leadership in patriarchy is wise and highly preferable to bitter feminism. You don't even necessarily have to teach on it. These truths can be absorbed almost by osmosis just because they are members of your group. It happens constantly. It happened to me when I first came to the laord

Virtually all mainstream entertainment that your people see, treats their Christian beliefs as foolish and contemptible. Our de-Christianized society encourages people to believe that fornication is good, you are a coward if you don't act on every urge, and resisting temptation is bad for your psychological health. Your people need to hear something very different, and you provide that every week.

Ephesians 5:5-9 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Your home group provides a counterbalance- the light of Christ- to the darkness that our brothers and sister are encountering daily in our faithless society.

3. People need someone to look up to. They don't necessarily know it. Especially in a stupid egalitarian culture like ours; people think it is noble that everybody is exactly the same, no one is better than anyone else. But, in a healthy culture people have always wanted to be led by others that are a few steps ahead of them. The fact is, God set up humanity to work in a hierarchy. So people *need* to be led and they *need* good examples. They *need* someone to look up to. They need somebody who is making it work, and is successful, even when they themselves fail. **III: one of the darkest times of my life was when I was a young man and my church began to experience some upheavals. Turns out it was a hotbed of sexual immorality. I was so disillusioned. “I’m the best God can do?!”**

1 Timothy 4:12 ..in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Titus 2: 7b-8a...in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, 8 sound in speech which is beyond reproach...

Whether you fully realize it or not, you are one of those people. Others are measuring themselves by your standards, your way of life, what you allow in your own life and what you disallow. Your godly life in influencing people- week in, week out- over the years. They won't usually TELL you that, so you'll never know, but it is happening.

Now we are talking about reasons to be encouraged as a home group leader – even if you don't always see the dramatic changes we wish to see. This next point cannot be over stated:

4. People need friends (the proper kind)

We are social animals. People are going to find friends somewhere. Loneliness can drive people into truly destructive relationships. In so many of the catastrophes I've seen as a pastor, grown men and women have been led into, and encouraged into, sin and foolish actions by bad company.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harms.

A middle aged woman's group of cheerleaders will tell her, “Of course your husband's a jerk. Of course you will be better off without him. A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” So, by the time we pastors get a hold of her, it's too late. Her mind is completely infected. She thinks to herself, “Any right minded person would dump this jerk that I've been married to and

suffering with all these years. This pastor disagrees, but he doesn't understand because he's one of the enemy too." But if her friends are God-fearing Christian women from the home group – that changes everything. What started out as a bit of dissatisfaction and self-pity gets identified as such by her Christian friends. They don't fan it into a full blown neurotic, irrational, self-absorbed victimhood that results in yet another divorce. Just being around the godly women in your home group changes the landscape of her thinking and the marriage is saved.

People influence each other. Merely by providing a place to meet, and some direction, you create the environment where godliness is "caught" from each other.

Proverbs 12:26 One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

5. Whether you see it or not- the Holy Spirit is at work in your teaching, discussions, and interactions. He's doing things that you are unaware of. **One of the funniest things about teaching for many years is that people will come up to you and say: "The time you taught such and such a thing changed my life". But you think to yourself, "I never taught that. It's not something I would even teach!" Nonetheless,** God is at work, discipling, convicting, and growing people with His word whether YOU are conscious of it or not. **That is because God will always back up His word:**

Is 55:10-13 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. [which is why God can say:] 12 For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up, and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up, and it will be a memorial to the Lord, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off."

You can always teach the word of God with confidence because God himself backs it up. Teaching the Bible gives God something He can work with in the lives of your people.

Most of the good you accomplish as a pastor is invisible to you.

Just as 90 percent of an iceberg is invisible, so a great deal of the effect we are having in our people's lives is invisible. But that doesn't mean you will NEVER see it:

1 Peter 5:1-4 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you... 2 to shepherd the flock of God...exercising oversight...according to the will of God... with eagerness... proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Why does the reward for pastoring come at the resurrection? Because it is only at the judgment where all the hidden things get revealed! But for now, most of the good you accomplish as a pastor is hidden, invisible to you and everyone else. Therefore:

Galatians 6:9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

80% OF AMERICANS HAVE NO ONE BUT FAMILY MEMEBERS TO CONFIDE IN

The study is based on surveys of 3000 people, part of the General Social Survey by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

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By Janet Kornblum, USA TODAY Americans have a third fewer close friends and confidants than just two decades ago — a sign that people may be living lonelier, more isolated lives than in the past. The percentage of people who confide only in family increased from 57% to 80%.

In 1985, the average American had three people in whom to confide matters that were important to them, says a study in today's American Sociological Review. In 2004, that number dropped to two, and one in four had no close confidants at all. "You usually don't see that kind of big social change in a couple of decades," says study co-author Lynn Smith-Lovin, professor of sociology at Duke University in Durham, N.C. Close relationships are a safety net, she says. "Whether it's picking up a child or finding someone to help you out of the city in a hurricane, these are people we depend on." Also, research has linked social isolation and loneliness to mental and physical illness. The study finds fewer contacts are from clubs and neighbors; people are relying more on family, a phenomenon documented in the 2000 book *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam, a Harvard public policy professor.

U.K. Appoints a Minister for Loneliness

From The New York Times, Jan 17. 2018

Britain has a serious problem with loneliness, research has found. More than nine million people in the country often or always feel lonely, according to a 2017 report published by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. The issue prompted Prime Minister Theresa May on

Wednesday to appoint a minister for loneliness. “For far too many people, loneliness is the sad reality of modern life,” Mrs. May said in a statement.