

Ed Horak

The Challenges to Excellence

Chapter 1

Excellence in Exile

Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him;... Daniel 6:3

If you are going to live a life with excellence, you are going to be challenged to succumb to outside pressures to slacken off and settle for the mediocre. Anything worthwhile takes effort to make it happen. Daniel provides an excellent example of a man who was the real deal. He lived out most of his productive life in captivity, far from home. His devotion was no fake thing. He showed commitment and disciplined integrity in his personal lifestyle, relationship with God, his friends, and his enemies.

Personal Lifestyle

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel 1:8

Although captured and far from family and community tradition, Daniel remains true to his convictions about eating defiled unclean foods that he was required to eat in the King's court. He remained steadfast in this seemingly unimportant area and God rewarded him with favor with the King's eunuchs and after ten days his commitment played out to his advantage. He was able to honor God and stay out of trouble in the King's court. How often do we consider small things to be unimportant? Yet, like a key to a large door, in ministry the small things can cause big things to unravel. Remember that Esau sold out his spiritual heritage for the momentary satisfaction of one meal! Food can compete with the Spirit of God calling you into times of communion with God in prayer and worship. I have found that I am spiritually more sensitive to God's voice when I keep my appetite in check. Food and drink can be a false comfort too. Fasting quickly shows you how important food is in your life.

The Bible says that a minister can disqualify himself through unchecked appetite. Watching your weight for example, is not only a health issue, it is a sign that you are in control of your appetite. God expects ministers to bring their own bodies into subjection.

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27

When finally brought before the King after the preparation period, Daniel and his friends are chosen above the others to serve the King. They were ten times better. What a level of

excellence they walked in! God will honor disciplined living in your ministry, but don't be surprised if He speaks to you about what you might consider to be unimportant: coffee, chocolates, muffins, exercise and the like.

His Friends

*Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king. **Daniel 2:48-49***

Daniel had been used by God to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's strange dream. The situation was dangerous. If the magicians and wise men could not tell the dream and its interpretation, they were doomed. He was probably sick and tired of all their soothsaying 'mumbo jumbo.' Daniel quickly sought out his friend's help when the challenge came, and they all prayed for God's mercies in this extremely dangerous situation.

Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel 2:17-20

Daniel gets the dream and the interpretation, blesses God, (never forget that) delivers it to the King, and his gift results in promotion for all of them after Daniel remembers the support of his friends.

Personally, through my sometimes foolish zeal I have got myself in an area of great uncertainty, where, without my friends, who knows where I would be today. Their counsel, prayers, non-judgmental friendship pulled me through some very tough spiritual and financial tight spots where the enemy was circling in for a knockout blow. My best friend is my wife and her intercession has been absolutely invaluable. Never forget who your friends are. Be there for them as they have been there for you.

Relationship With God And Calling

Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said:

*"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.
And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.
He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him.*

*"I thank You and praise You,
O God of my fathers;
You have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me what we asked of You,
For You have made known to us the king's demand."*

Daniel 2:19-23

The minister of excellence honors the source of His anointing. All things are of God, through Him and to him. Just because God is patient with our arrogance, we should nevertheless be sober minded and realize that without God we really are nothing, helpful to no one. Never become inflated with your own self-importance. Keep focused on God's importance. When you praise and worship Him, both in private and in public, God remains the center of attention.

Later, Daniel is challenged to speak for God even though the word is one of judgment against the King's pride. He interprets Nebuchadnezzar's second dream about the great tree being cut down. When he delivers the call for the King's repentance, he still honors him in his position of authority. He is not 'judgmental' in his delivery and is genuinely concerned about the king's well-being.

"This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you."

Then Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. So the king spoke, and said, "Belshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you."

Belshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!" **Daniel 4:18-19**

Daniel's ministry is vindicated twelve months later, when the king, unrepentant, is caught up with his own importance, and is driven out to later come to his senses. In humility he recognizes his pride and truly honors God.

Like Daniel, the minister of excellence will at times be called upon to speak correction and rebuke. If you are insecure and see success in ministry as winning a popularity contest, then chances are you will be ensnared by the fear of man, and stay minimally effective in ministry.

His Enemies

Later under King Belshazzar (Nebuchadnezzar's son) Daniel is called to exercise his gift once again. King Belshazzar holds an ungodly feast defiling the temple vessels captured from Jerusalem years before. Daniel interprets the writing on the wall and fearlessly declares God's judgment. That night Belshazzar is slain and King Darius, a Mede, is enthroned. Daniel is one of three overseeing governors in his kingdom. Daniel distinguishes himself because of the excellent spirit in him, and the king wanted to promote him even further.

Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these

men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Daniel 6:3-5

We are called to live exemplary lives in the world even if it draws fire from envious others. Don't be naive. People will go to ungodly lengths to bring you down from the heights of integrity to their low level of meanness. Be like Daniel. Stand your ground. Don't change a thing and see God reward your faithfulness.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. Daniel 6:10-11

Daniel survives a night in the lion's den because of supernatural intervention, and God uses Daniel's commitment and consistency to bring Him glory in the realm. Prayer brought God's presence, power and protection. His ministry to men flowed from his priority: ministering to the Lord!

God goes on to give Daniel end time prophetic dreams that speak of the coming Messiah, giving him the privilege of impacting generations to come after him with these words of encouragement (Daniel 7). When we are faithful, we will be a blessing for our generation, and also for the next. We can and should play our part in cooperating with God to make modern history, no matter the size of our sphere of influence. Make a difference that lasts. Ministry is not about meetings man's current needs only, but more about establishing God's eternal purposes.

God used Daniel's ministry to impact His people's destiny. Daniel Chapter Nine speaks of the understanding Daniel got through the 'books.' The prophet Jeremiah had prophesied seventy years in captivity. Daniel dug into these prophecies and gained understanding from another man's ministry. He understood God's ways. That is, He speaks His will first, then expects His people to respond in faith with what they are required to do. He went into intercession for what he saw in the books. He submitted his understanding to another man's ministry. He received the words of the other prophet God had been using, and prospered in his own ministry. When we realize that we all know and prophesy in part, it is wise to add someone else's part to ours to become stronger. Let another's ministry complement yours and vice versa. Avoid competition and through relationship allow God to infuse his life through His body by what you add.

Daniel humbly identified with his people's sins as an intercessor, even though he personally was righteous and could have stood aloof. The minister of excellence will always identify with his people in intercession.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans--in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, 5 we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Daniel 9:3-5

Daniel focused on God's mercy and cried out for Jerusalem, God's city, and God's people. He recognized God's ownership and wanted to bring God glory.

Daniel continues to minister into his eighties, surviving several generations of kings. He was fruitful even in old age: a mark of excellence.

*Those who are planted in the house of the LORD
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
To declare that the LORD is upright;
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*

Psalm 92:13-15

Daniel was a man who 'planted' in his spirit in the things of God. Although in physical captivity his spirit was free to worship God in spirit and truth thus transcending the limitations place on him by men. He rose above these and soared in his ministry because he waited upon the Lord in prayer and faithful devotion. You can too.

Chapter 2

Excellence Forged in Difficulty

It would be nice to say to young ministers that ministry is simply without difficulty. Even in the will of God sometimes ministry involves struggle through much adversity. We are encouraged to **fight** the good fight of faith for good reason. Before any victory comes a fight! Joseph's life teaches the minister of excellence some very good lessons. Let's begin by looking at Joseph's family background.

The 'Joseph Family'

*Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. **Genesis 37:1-4***

Joseph was born to Jacob and Rachel. Jacob was Isaac's son: the ex-chiseler who stole the birthright and blessing from Esau, and Rachel was the daughter of Laban who tricked Jacob into marrying Leah. So Joseph came from a family that was interesting to say the least. He was Jacob's favorite son with his own special coat of many colors, and a dreamer on top of it. He also was a 'tattle-tale.' So his brothers with their own problems of jealousy sold the dreamer into slavery, beginning a whole process of character building that stretched thirteen years. Joseph had the charisma. He was gifted, but much preparation would follow.

Joseph's Brothers

It is wonderful when family is supportive of your ministry. This is God's best. However, what do you do when family do not support your efforts for the Lord? Joseph suffered at the hands of his family, yet overcame family persecution and trials.

I remember when I first heard the call into ministry. Both my family and my wife's family thought we had certainly 'gone off' a bit. My wife's mother cried, and was worried we were giving up so much for such an uncertain future. I suppose she was only thinking from her own frame of reference. Perhaps the ministers she had come across were a sorry bunch. Others in the family sort of looked down their noses at us. In short they did not support us that much, kind of mild compared to some folk we know who were even excommunicated from their families.

Jesus did warn us that this could happen. We know He came to bring life love and acceptance to all, but also said that a 'sword of division' would fall. Not that He creates the division. The peace He came to bring was not a false sense of peace through compromise, but a genuine lasting one that was based on submission to His Lordship. When family refuse to repent, change and come under Jesus command, they become the source of division, and not the one who obeys the call!

Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Luke 12:51-53

Joseph's youthful arrogance and insistence antagonized his brothers, already put out by their father's favoritism. They took out their frustration on Joseph and not Jacob. In ministry few will take their complaint to God, rather choosing to take out their frustrations on those near them, their peers.

Joseph's brother's hate produced envy or jealousy which dictionaries define as being 'competitively set against or discontent with the benefit and superiority of another.'

Ministerial envy is what the minister of excellence is going to face, so be prepared. There are differences of callings and anointing, so learn not to covet what is not yours to have, nor seek to deprive another of what God saw fit to give them! Do not be like the brothers who defiled themselves personally, affected their relationship with their earthly father and their heavenly Father. The Bible teaches that envy is like rottenness in your bones or core being (Proverbs 14:30), and affects peer relationships (James 3:14). How many ministers are jealous of what God is doing through another ministry across town, forgetting that there is a world in sin that lies between the two churches waiting to be reached with the gospel?

Instead of seeing another's ministry as a complement to their own, insecure ministers see other ministers only a threat or competition for supposed scarce resources. The body of Christ has some way to go before perfecting unity, so purpose to be a part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Envy Is A Work Of The Flesh

Remember too, that God's wisdom should not be questioned. After all Jesus chose only twelve apostles from many potential candidates. Later, He chose only three of the Apostles to go up the mountain with Him. The other's had to deal with it. Realize that with increased privilege there is an increase in the price you have to pay. The higher you go, the narrower or more strict the judgment. History shows that the twelve paid the ultimate price of their lives for the cause.

Find your identity, security and purpose and rewards in Christ! Meditate on being complete in Him. It is not what you do that makes you complete, it is who you are in Him that gives your identity. The 'what' of ministry flows out of the 'who' of relationship, which no one can take from you when you realize that nothing can separate you from Christ's love.

...and you are complete in Him, Colossians 2:10

Joseph 'The Dreamer'

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over

us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Genesis 37:5-11

God has a dream and we fit into it! Joseph was the chosen vessel for God's dream for that generation, yet his brothers were so short sighted and Joseph so immature. God is the great dream giver and calls us all to greatness and significance. He just has different places for each of us to fit in. Joseph was not chosen because of His inherent merit. We should realize that anything good in our lives comes from God. We should therefore walk humbly before Him. Our uniqueness comes from God, but we must realize that we still have to abide by the rules of God's greater scheme. Joseph had to change in order to carry the responsibility that would come to him at Pharaoh's side years later.

Without a dream or revelation from God, the temptation to fill up ministry with 'good ideas' rather than 'God ideas' is very real. Even though God will allow you to fill up your life with activity, His plan is for us to be productive and bear much fruit. 'God dreams' provide true lasting focus, and keep you motivated through difficult times.

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; ... **Proverbs 29:18**

Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery

Joseph is sold into slavery and it appears that his dreams are fast fading. He descended deeper into delay, discouragement and distraction as he went from the heights of promise to the pit, then Potiphar's house and then finally the depths of prison. The Bible says God was with him through all of this.

"And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, ... **Acts 7:9-10**

On the road to greatness, Joseph learned to overcome three key challenges to his destiny. In the pit of rejection he faced everyman's need for acceptance. Family rejection is always the worst. Jesus faced it from his own natural family, even his closest disciples, and found his identity solely in His relationship with His heavenly Father. We too must find our identity in God's acceptance into His family.

"...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved" **Ephesians 1:5-6**

If we solely rely on people to give us identity through their acceptance of what we do, a time will come where we will disappoint them. In ministry, get used to the fact that not everyone

will so excited about what you do all the time. Realize that your value is not found in the position you hold in the church or how well you practice or do ministry, but in the fact that God loved you enough to accept you into His family as you are. Anything we do after that does not change His love for us. His love never changes.

Secondly, Joseph was tested in his strength of character in being able to say no to passion. In fact his good character got him into trouble when he resisted Potiphar's wife's advances. He suffered persecution for his righteousness. Externally, in a far away land as an anonymous slave, he did not have much to lose. But internally, he had much to lose with God's call on his life. His test was in 'secret' and in obscurity, yet he shows us that what we do in private with eventually show in public. In ministry, private devotion, obedience and integrity counts more than public performance, in God's eyes at least. We can all learn to 'put it on' in front of the public eye, but can we control our passion in private.

Thirdly, he learnt to endure the setback of prison isolation. There are times when you feel alone in ministry, yet Joseph teaches us that our gift can function despite confinement. He continued to be faithful during the difficult times. He served his fellow prisoners when he interpreted their dreams, and continued to qualify for promotion, despite some more delays as he was forgotten for another two years. In ministry, when you stay faithful, God will promote you at precisely the right time. He never forgets, and Joseph was propelled from the isolation of prison into the King's palace.

He becomes a thirteen year old 'overnight sensation.' When you scratch beneath the surface of successful ministers they have been in preparation for years. When Joseph has two sons, one is named Manasseh or 'forgetful', the other Ephraim or 'fruitful.' The minister of excellence must learn to forget the hurtful past and enjoy the fruitful reward of a life marked by the stamp of God's presence: God was with him!

Later, his merciful dealings with his brothers provide a shining example how God continued to use Joseph to show His love and provision for the "Joseph family." His brothers had sinned against their father, Joseph and God, and had lived with a burden of guilt for twenty two years. Joseph helps them when they come unknowingly come to him for help in a time of famine. We must be prepared to help God's people who have hurt us in the past, but now are in need. Truly, we have all hurt someone at some time, and stand in the same need of God's mercy. Aim at reconciliation, not vengeance. As a minister of God's grace we must faithfully communicate the riches of his mercy.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..."

Ephesians 2:4-5

Busy yourself with excellence, and your impact and legacy will take care of itself. Don't neglect the small things. Understand the **purpose** of character tests. They purify, prepare and promote us for the next level. They remove improper motives and as we grow stronger, we are able to produce more fruit to God's glory. As we stay connected to God under trial, a time comes when we enjoy God's perspective on our lives. Things which made no sense now come into clear focus. God's wisdom is played out in ultimate fruitfulness.

Chapter 3

Prepared for Pitfalls

God wants us to prosper in the work of our hands as we walk in the light of His word.

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path. Psalm 119:105*

He will give us the general direction (path) to follow as well as the specific steps: (lamp to my feet). He has provided His word and the leading of the Holy Spirit to give us direction on two scales so that we do not need to fall into the camouflaged pits of the enemy. What we are blinded to, can trip us up, and in ministry it is vital to be aware of the age-old techniques of our adversary. Fortunately we don't have to learn the hard way in the "school of hard knocks," but can learn from the word and experience of others more seasoned in ministry. Youthful zeal is no match for our ancient adversary's guile. Let's look into some P's and D's that you need to watch for.

Pride, Prestige And Position

If the enemy can't get you with some direct failure, he will seek to turn your success in ministry against you through pride, prestige and the power of position. Many ministers become trapped in a 'golden cage' of their success. They forget where they came from, and begin to believe that their efforts earned them their position. Sure, ministry takes personal effort and sacrifice. No one else has paid their dues quite like you have.

Nevertheless it is only through God's strength and sustaining grace that any minister gets where he is. So all praise goes to Him anyway. The antidote to pride is a sober minded realization of who we are without Christ. A big Zero. It's only when He adds His value to our zeroes that our ministries have significance. There is a fine line between exercising bold and dynamic ministry leadership, and maintaining a servant's heart. As this generation boldly steps out in its authority in Christ, it must never forget to honor God's preeminence. People look for heroes, and ministers who do well run the risk of being glorified where pride can corrupt the purity of ministry as they enjoy the prestige and power their position brings.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,... **Galatians 6:14**

'Pennies' Or Financial Impropriety

How a minister stewards the financial rewards God releases to him, will determine his long-term fruitfulness and increase. God is watching to see how you treat His money. We are first of all accountable to Him to multiply what we receive. Then we are accountable to those we serve. Money must always be spent for what it was given. Riches in themselves do not have any inherent moral content. They corrupt only when a minister's heart is swayed by the lack or abundance of

money. We qualify in God's sight to govern His people only when we can govern or steward finances properly.

And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' **Luke 19:17**

In this parable of the minas, the master expected the servants to bring increase to the money that was entrusted to them. The reward for faithfulness in this area was greater responsibility over the lives of people in cities. There is therefore a correlation between financial integrity and the trust God wants to give to ministers over the lives of His people. If satan can corrupt a leader in the area of "pennies" he can short circuit God's plan for promotion. Conduct all financial matters with integrity and in the fear of the Lord.

Presumption

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. **Genesis 11:1-9**

Presumption may be defined as pressing ahead with your project without first checking it with the Lord.

In this extreme example of presumption, we see the project ultimately failing after initial success. The leaders led with great success: they had a vision; and there was unity, commitment and clear communication. They all spoke the same thing and threw their best efforts into the project. It grew and grew, then suddenly collapsed; as they all melted away in confusion after God had come down to thwart their rebellion. God had previously commanded them to spread out and populate the earth. They refused to obey, and centralized their efforts in ungodly worship in defiance of God's plan.

A ministry may have a good idea, a vision, dynamic leadership skills, unity and commitment, but if the good idea is not a God idea, then God is obliged to judge the presumption. The most vital stage of any endeavor is the conception. Is the ministry a product of intimacy with God or with self-centered ideas of what a person thinks God wants?

God is looking for productivity not frantic activity. He has promised to give increase to what is sown in the good soil of His purposes and plans. Better to take time at the beginning to hear from the Lord and be sure, than to presume that God is obliged to back what we think is a good project. Personally God has been merciful to me when I have stepped out ahead of Him in my immaturity. He is patient and wants us to learn His ways and timing.

King David's two battles with the Philistines provide a good example of how to avoid presumption. After enjoying a mighty victory the first time against the enemy, David takes the time to find out God's battle strategy for the second time round when they came back to fight him again.

Now when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. The Philistines also went and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand." So David went to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there; and he said, "The LORD has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of water." Therefore he called the name of that place Baal Perazim. And they left their images there, and David and his men carried them away.

Then the Philistines went up once again and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. Therefore David inquired of the LORD, He said, "You shall not go up; circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees . And it shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees , then you shall advance quickly. For then the LORD will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines." And David did so, as the LORD commanded him; and he drove back the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.

2 Samuel 5:17-25

Notice that both times King David "inquired of the Lord" before he went out to battle. He did not presume the second time round that victory would be won the same way as before. Strategy is vital to continued success. The minister of excellence must continually seek the Lord for His endorsement and strategy on every step to be taken. Ministry is not about discovering a formula and blindly applying it over and over. Stay in touch with your source of success.

'Petticoats' Or Immoral Involvement

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."
Matthew 26:41-42

Why would Jesus warn us to watch and pray, if we were not subject to temptation? A leader becomes attractive to others of the opposite sex for the following reasons:

Self confidence: People are attracted to those that feel good about themselves.

Authoritativeness: People are drawn to those who convey a sense that they can master situations.

Public recognition: Success attracts attention. People often want to be in on something and with someone who is making things happen.

Concern: The spiritual leader who caringly shows interest in hurting people attracts the needy who might not get that level of concern at home.

Gentleness: There is a romantic quality in gentleness that is attractive to people who have been harshly treated.

The minister of excellence certainly wants to display these qualities, but be aware that there will be people who will not even know that their flesh is weak and become tools of the enemy. Walk closely with the Lord, your spouse and family. Love them openly, minimize the risk by avoiding unsupervised private moments, realize your own fleshly frailty, be alert and maintain the fear of the Lord.

Now To The D's

Delays

God always operates on a timetable, His and not ours.

He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

God sent Jesus to save us in the fullness of His time table. We would do well to know and cooperate with Him in matters of timing. When delays come, we learn from Abraham and Sarah that haste will produce an "Ishmael." God had promise them a child, but after years of waiting, they took matters in their own hands and prematurely produced Ishmael. Be sure not to get ahead of God and produce Ishmaels in ministry.

Very often a minister will have the general direction right, but not the method of how to get there. **How** you do things, and **when** you do them, are as important to God as **what** we do in His name.

Patience is a fruit of a spirit abiding in the Lord. Haste works against planning and diligence and tends towards poverty. Ambition can push you to get head of God.

*The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty,
But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.*

Proverbs 21:5

Get God's perspective on things. Realize that your own time frame may be incorrect. Like the sons of Issachar, trust God for a sense of timing. What you do in excellence is always linked to time and timing.

...of the children of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do,... **1 Chronicles 12:32**

Trial, tribulation and testing that delay sometimes causes, produces Godly character. This certainly was the case in Joseph's life. He waited thirteen years for his dream to come to pass. Remember, charisma without character produces chaos

Deflection

You may start well but end up poorly, deflected off course by a variety of distracting circumstances. If the enemy of our souls cannot stop us, he can get us off course and ultimately miss the mark. Through time you can become weary of well doing and settle for an easier path. Having a written vision can keep you focused. We are encouraged in Habakkuk 2:1-4 to *write* the vision. In time vision can become hazy. Life and ministry involves constant adjustment to stay on track. Like a space capsule on a mission to the moon needs constant small corrections on its long journey, we too, need to check up and see to it that we are on course over a period of time.

The sad story of a young prophet who was deflected off course serves as a sober warning to the minister of excellence.

Briefly, a man of God is lead of the Lord to prophesy against the altar of Jereboam. The altar splits, as prophesied and Jereboam's hand withers as he comes against the young prophet. God has mercy on Jereboam as the young prophet entreats the Lord to restore his hand. He is invited to Jeroboam's home to be refreshed but refuses because the Lord had earlier given him a command.

But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.' " So he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel.

1 Kings 13:8-10

So far, so good. But trouble was brewing! An old prophet hears the story from his sons, perhaps moved by envy, and commissions them to get a donkey ready for so he can meet him on the way and invite the younger prophet to come home and eat with him. He gives the invitation, and the younger prophet tells the sons he cannot.

*And he said, "I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For I have been told by the word of the LORD, 'You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.' " He said to him, "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' " (He was lying to him.) So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water. **1 Kings 13:16-19***

The young prophet is deflected off course through the lying intimidation of the older prophet, now being used by the enemy to cause him to disobey God's original command. Can you believe it? Another minister being used to get the first minister out of God's will? When you hear from God, be certain and confident, and stay that way. Your word will be contested! Then the older prophet hears the word of the Lord again, strange as it may seem, and prophesies the young man's demise.

*Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; and he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the LORD said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.' " **1 Kings 13:20-22***

Other people will always have their own ideas and agenda. Be sure to obey God explicitly. He does not contradict Himself to you. Sure, respect your elders in the Lord, learn from their experience, but not to the contradiction of what the Lord has shown you. Trust Him to give you discernment. For we live in perilous times and need His perspective on everything at all times.

And An 'E' For Envy

There is a temptation to look at what someone else is doing and compare. I believe it opens the door to envy, and the Bible warns us against unwise comparison.

*For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. **2 Corinthians 10:12***

Your standard is always God's word to you. Not what He has said to someone else in their ministry. He gave you your talents, and them theirs. We give an account to Him, whereas comparison opens the door to the enemy through pride and or envy.

Envy can be defined as 'resentment against another's success or favor'. If you are not secure in your own calling, gifting and placement in the Body of Christ you become fair game for the adversary. We must not give him any room to move. Identity must always be found in who you are in Christ, not what you do or don't do in His kingdom. He definitely wants you to be productive and bear much fruit, and when you see others doing just that, there is a temptation to question oneself. Guard against envy and its close cousins: pride and criticism. Remember that God is not a respecter of persons and what He has done for others he will do for you as He has promised. Realize that success is measured in terms of what God has instructed you to do, not what others have to do. Avoid becoming prideful of your achievements, and critical of fellow minister's efforts.

Jesus ministry affords a classic example of ministerial envy. He was the rising star in the nation and as His following increased, He became a huge threat to the religious status quo. Finally, the Jewish leaders handed Him over to Roman authorities on trumped up charges to be crucified. The curious thing was that Pilate knew why they were doing it. It was because of envy.

Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

Mark 15:6-10

Their envy drove them to be inconsistent and hypocritical. They exchanged a known and dangerous criminal, Barabbas, for the righteous Son of God in whom they earlier had found no proven wrong!

Later, the dramatically converted Paul faces religious persecution from the same types as he ministered in Antioch, Asia Minor. He preached in the local Jewish synagogue and created a stir with his success amongst the Gentiles.

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Acts 13:42-45

The religious leaders were “filled with envy” and were even being driven to blaspheme! Sadly, many ministers who attend ministerial conferences fall into criticizing other ministers’ successes. How do I know? I have been there myself.

Miriam and Aaron also envied Moses ministry. Remember Moses was not called by God and equipped to lead the nation because of some inherent quality he possessed that was better than theirs. Moses was a fugitive murderer who spent forty years tending sheep in obscurity. When he returns in the power of the Lord to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, and Miriam his sister, who should have known better and Aaron stand by his side playing their part, we see envy rearing its ugly head.

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) Numbers 12:1-3

On the surface their envy was smoke screened by the excuse about Moses’ wife being a gentile. But the Word saw through it all. They were envious of his unique calling and tried to bring him down to their level. God did use them, but He used Moses more. He had been chosen, and indeed had paid a greater price. He was also more humble than they were, and they resented that.

How many ministers have endeavored to copy what someone else is doing simply to keep up with the ‘ministerial Jones’? They busy themselves with projects, even good works that God never intended for them.

Leadership is always exercised within the boundaries of God’s order. He had called Moses, with Miriam and Aaron as support ministers, along with Hur. Everyone has a place uniquely reserved for them in God’s kingdom, and to covet another’s place is folly.

‘Keeping rank’ is something the minister of excellence ought to do. The men who came to King David could keep rank. They knew their place and were also determined to recognize David’s leadership as King.

All these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart, to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest of Israel were of one mind to make David king.

1 Chronicles 12:38

Jesus has called us to keep ranks and to have loyal hearts towards Him. When we keep our eyes on Him, and not our fellow ministers, we won’t fall into the envy trap.