

10 Tough Questions for Ministers Who Peddle Multilevel Marketing Products to the Church

There is a troubling church trend I have witnessed over the last couple of years: ministers of the gospel selling multilevel marketing products to the body of Christ. It's a craze that appears to be gaining momentum with no signs of slowing down. The danger, if not addressed, is that it will take root in the culture of ministry and become "normal Christianity."

A couple of months ago, I tuned into the Facebook Live of a minister I highly respect and to whom I have enjoyed listening. I have been spiritually fed by his broadcasts many times before. This time I wasn't. Rather than spurring me on to greater things in God, he tried to convince me to purchase a multilevel product he was selling. A sadness came over me. Something felt very wrong about what I was watching. Previously, all his Facebook Lives were about God. That particular day, the testimonial he showcased had nothing to do with a life changed by Jesus, but everything to do with the product he was selling. I, too, could have the same results if I purchased this multilevel marketing product.

Thinking this was just a fluke, a few days later, I watched another Facebook Live of this minister. I heard the same sales pitch. It happened again a third time.

I've stopped tuning in entirely. This scenario has repeated itself more times than I can count. Same spiel, different minister.

Quick disclaimer: There is absolutely nothing wrong with

bivocational ministry, ministers owning their own businesses or raising ministry funds by selling Christian books and CDs, ministry mentoring and coaching and so on. And God certainly is not against ministers making money or having nice things (within godly parameters). I understand ministry costs money. I'm a pastor; I feel your pain and share your struggles.

But there is something very different about the multilevel marketing frenzy taking place among ministers of the gospel, and I believe it boils down to this:

It can violate the sacred trust people have in ministers—a trust given by Almighty God for the express purpose of furthering the gospel.

God's people trust what we say; our words carry weight. If we say something works, they have a greater tendency to believe it does. If we tell them they need to sign up for a business venture, they will consider it more seriously. If we tell them they will be financially blessed if they sell a particular product, they will think about it longer than normal.

They trust that we:

- Hear from God.
- Have their best interests at heart.
- Wouldn't lead them astray.
- Give wise counsel.
- Only speak truth.
- Would never lie.
- Are anointed by God.

But to capitalize on that sacred trust to make money off of the body of Christ could easily cross the line to, well, exploitation.

If you are a minister of the gospel involved in a multilevel marketing business or are considering an opportunity to do so, I believe our loving heavenly Father wants to ask you a series

of “search your heart” questions. While not meant as accusations or judgments (only God knows your heart), these questions are worth your time honestly answering. Eternity is at stake. Your call is at stake. Souls are at stake.

Here are 10 sets of questions for soul-searching reflection:

1. God entrusts ministers with influence; He provides ministers with a platform from which to preach the gospel. Are you willing to risk damaging your influence for a multilevel marketing business? Have you allowed someone to talk you into using your God-given platform for financial gain? Have you let someone stand on your platform that you shouldn't have?
2. Developing relationships with brothers and sisters in the Lord is a godly pursuit –but only with the right motives. Are you connecting with Christians for business recruiting purposes (on social media, meeting for coffee and so on) that you normally wouldn't otherwise? Have you felt, even just a little, as though you were using people? (I have made the decision not to invite guest speakers to my church who are involved in multilevel marketing businesses to protect my congregation from even the possibility of being used and manipulated.)
3. Let the peace of a God be your umpire (Col. 3:15). Have you had a check in your spirit anywhere along the way of this multilevel journey? Have you ignored a check in the spirit by reasoning it away in your head? Have you ignored lingering questions in your heart that selling multilevel marketing products might not be God's best for you? Shouldn't a lack of peace be your first clue?
4. “In the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14b). Has your spouse, wise friend, trusted counselor or ministry leader spotted any red flags with your involvement in multilevel marketing? Are you blinded from seeing those red flags because you don't wear rose-colored glasses? Are the “get rich quick” success stories

thwarting your otherwise good judgment?

5. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). This is true as well: out of the abundance of the heart, the Facebook status speaks! Please take a hard look at your social media posts. Are they becoming more and more about the products you are selling, and less and less about Jesus? Are you spending the time on social media "building your business" that you used to dedicate to "building the kingdom?"
6. No doubt you have lived an honorable life, full of ministry integrity. But since you have become involved in multilevel marketing, have you made any decisions that have been less than virtuous or violated your core values in any way? Have you made compromises, even small, that could tarnish your integrity? Have you changed who you are to morph into what the multilevel marketing company wants you to be?
7. As ministers of the gospel, we warn God's people not to jump on every new fad bandwagon; that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). Have you modeled before the people of God what you have told them not to do? When the products you are marketing fizzle in popularity (it is inevitable), will you have any regrets? Are you willing to lose your God-given credibility for monetary gain?
8. God promises that as we seek first His kingdom and righteousness, He will provide all we need (see Matt. 6:33). I'm sure during your entire ministry journey you have walked by faith every step of the way, trusting Jehovah Jireh as your provider. But did the mounting pressure of getting closer to retirement, or not having enough saved, cause you to make a decision out of fear? Have you made any decisions regarding this business venture based on money rather than God? Are you doing something you thought you never would out of desperation? Is this the time to stop trusting God as your provider?

9. Staying focused on our ministry assignment and throwing off anything that hinders our race is a constant fight (Heb. 12:1). Has your multilevel marketing business caused you to lose some of your ministry focus? Has it caused you to lose eternal focus? Has it slowed you down from fulfilling God's mandate for your life?
10. Some ministers would retort that they are using their new income stream to build the kingdom. Yet, over the years, I have personally seen multilevel marketing businesses do great damage to the kingdom – even splitting churches. Is your multilevel marketing business harming the church in any way? Is it bringing disdain on your ministry or reputation? Are you hurting relationships with other believers, ministers or churches?

After you have humbly asked yourself these questions, if there were any troubling responses, please take them before our merciful God in prayer. Ask Him to speak to you regarding your involvement in multilevel marketing. If He convicts you, repent. Even repent publicly if God instructs. Rededicate yourself to trusting in Him for all you need and walking by faith. And stand back and watch God restore all that needs healing, provide for your needs and prove Himself strong in all areas of your life and ministry. {eo}

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