

5 Insidious Lies That Can Trap You When Marriage and Ministry Collide

Modern culture puts intense pressure on marriages. The only way any marriage can thrive is through God's grace as the glue holding husband and wife together. And for couples where one or both are in Christian ministry, the challenges are often even greater. When marriage and ministry collide, the damage can potentially be severe.

Those on the outside can be surprised when a Christian leader is involved in an affair, or their marriage ends. People can express shock at the number of pastors who struggle with pornography, or how many of their children struggle with the church and their own families. In reality, pastors and ministry leaders are people too, and because of the extra pressures, they must be even more intentional about dealing with small issues before they become large.

Here are some lies those in ministry can easily fall into. And these lies hold the potential to wreak havoc on those closest to you and your own legacy in ministry.

Lie No. 1: God's work must come first.

This is perhaps the most insidious lie of all. Yes, God's opinion is the one that matters most, and He has called you. But it's so easy to confuse God's call with our human ego's desires for success, or as a justification for ignoring character growth, emotional maturity or investing in your most important human relationship.

Doing "the Lord's work" must never be allowed to take the place of following the Lord. Though ministry always adds challenges to marriage and family, be exceedingly cautious

before taking any step in ministry that would put church work above your spouse. Moving forward in a way that might sacrifice your marriage to serve God should only be done after many months of intense prayer and deep struggle. Most of the time, “putting God’s work first” is only an excuse for neglecting the investment your marriage requires.

Lie No. 2: Preparing for ministry prepares one for marriage.

Being in ministry does not suspend God’s plan for marriage. Fail to develop the skills needed for communication, intimacy, forgiveness, friendship, conflict resolution and character growth that marriage demands, and you and your marriage will be in trouble. Most people in ministry will be married, and if that’s you make sure to invest as much or more in your relationship as you do in ministry.

The little things matter. Be a student of your spouse, and of healthy relationships. Treat your marriage as the most valuable thing it is, second only to your own relationship with God. Ministry is a distant third or fourth.

Lie No. 3: Ministry means we’ve got to look good.

Yes, those in ministry are held to a higher standard. Most pastors and ministry leaders live in the proverbial fishbowl. Too often that leads to developing a “ministry persona” to hide behind. What you do and say matters to lots of people and to the kingdom of God. But trying to look perfect will always backfire if it means you are covering up aspects of your character where God needs you to grow.

Being appropriately transparent about your own growth and struggles can be a safeguard against the ministry mask. Give God permission to deal with your “stuff” and to then use your own journey as a way to give encouragement to others. You know where the source is; be the guide, not the hero.

Lie No. 4: We're all alone.

Ministry can be intensely isolating even while it's "living in a fishbowl." Ministry leaders often feel they have no truly safe place to get help for their struggles, either personal or in their marriage. The pressure to perform can feel extreme.

Pastors and ministry leaders are people too. You struggle with lack of intimacy, pornography, conflict and lack of communication in your marriage just as others do. Your old baggage flares up in the presence of those closest to you—your spouse and kids. As hard as it is to do, prayerfully and intentionally seek out support—a fellow ministry leader, a counselor and so on. Do whatever it takes to connect with a person or few people where you can truly be real in every way.

Lie No. 5: Ministry growth means everything is OK.

The bigger the ministry, the more opportunities present themselves, the more doors God seems to be opening, the greater the temptation becomes to overlook things close to home. It can become increasingly difficult to do what it takes to keep your personal character and your marriage growing and thriving.

Ministry leaders need to spend daily time in prayer and Bible reading for their own soul nourishment, completely aside from preparing for ministry. When the Holy Spirit points out small things in your character that need to be dealt with, pay attention. Do the work necessary to become emotionally healthy. Treat your spouse and marriage as the priceless gifts they are.

In the eternal scheme of things God is much more concerned with how you treat your spouse than how much Scripture you memorize or how many sermons you preach. It's your character work, not your church work, that will allow you to hear Him say, "Well done."

Your Turn: *If you're in any kind of ministry, have any of these lies crept into your thinking? Is God stirring your heart to make any changes? Leave a comment below. {eoa}*

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley *is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the Fully Alive kind of life that Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .*

This article originally appeared at .