

Are You Surrounded by Fools?

I had a giant blind spot in my life called entitlement. But I didn't know it was there until a trusted friend pointed it out.

If you've ever come to visit us in Redding, you know the Bethel parking lot can fill up quicker than a mall parking lot on Black Friday. I pulled up to the church one day and couldn't find a spot, even in our staff-reserved lot. The only one available was a handicap spot in the staff lot that was never used. We didn't even have anyone on staff who would need the handicap spot, so I figured it was fine for me to park in it. Especially given that I'd never seen anyone use it. I am a senior pastor, after all. So I parked in the handicap spot and carried on my way.

A few days later, my friend Dann Farrelly approached me. He gently said, "Hey Kris; I don't feel good about you parking in that handicap spot. What were you thinking?" I immediately recounted all the reasons I had thought through; we didn't have any handicapped staff, the whole lot was full and I was a lead pastor who needed to get into the building. How was this not obvious?

Dann responded, "Well, that's not really the point. First of all, your justifications are not true, because handicapped people actually need that spot even if they're not on staff. It has a pathway that leads to other buildings they may need to get to," he said.

"But the bigger deal is that you're setting an example to staff and communicating to them with your actions whether you realize it or not. You're saying you can ignore laws you don't agree with. And breaking them doesn't count if you're not caught. It's just not right."

I thought he was crazy. We had a passionate dialogue (read: a

heated argument), and I walked away furious. But I thought about it for a few days and cooled down. I realized this was more than just a convenient place to park, and I did have a sense that I was somehow above the law, my years at Bethel granting me permission to break the rules. I came down from my high horse, and in the end, I appreciated Dann's feedback. He helped me see an area of growth I didn't even know I needed, and because of his input, I'm a better leader now.

Kindness is Cool, But Don't Be a Fool

I love what I see happening in the world right now with people knowing their need to be in connection and relationship with other people. This not only empowers us into a more fulfilling and healthy life, but it's also necessary for living out our destinies. One thing to consider when looking for community is that not every person is the right choice for you to be in relationship with.

Think about it. I'm sure you've heard someone say, "Oh, he's a great kid; he just got in with the wrong crowd." You become like the people you surround yourself with. Look around you. Do you see a bunch of idiots? Don't be one yourself; choose your friends wisely.

I know some of you may be thinking, "Well, Kris, the Bible says to love all people!" I'm not arguing with that. We are all called to be kind to others, regardless of their state of need or brokenness. I'm not saying you should be harsh or mean. I'm simply saying not all people to whom you minister should be able to speak into your life. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed." So how do you balance your heart to love people without finding yourself suffering harm from being a companion of fools?

The key is to give people different levels of access—to knowing you, spending time with you, speaking into your life—to the degree to which you want them to influence you. Boundaries play a huge role in this. They're a way of letting the right people in on your life. When you're in deep relationship with someone who is producing good fruit, you've allowed them to be an influencer on your life. There's a give and take as you exchange vulnerability and wisdom with one another. On the other hand, when you allow an idiot to influence your life, the fruit in your own life will begin to look like the (often- rotten) fruit you see in theirs. And in the end, you'll find yourself looking in the mirror only to find another idiot.

Let Others In

If the truth sets you free, then taking counsel from truth-tellers is the best way to set yourself up for freedom. Once you've discerned and chosen the people you want in your inner circle, it's important to invite them to give you counsel. And remember, you set the tone. Creating a safe space for people to feel as though they can share what they're seeing in your life is key to becoming a world-changer. So ask for feedback, then listen. How you respond will communicate how much you value the person who is sharing their opinion.

So many times people have asked me to speak into their lives and then given me the cold shoulder or argued with me when they don't agree with my opinion. Some have even given me the silent treatment. This kind of punishment does not make me want to share with them again. I'm not saying I'm always right, and I don't always expect people to agree with me, but I do want to feel the people to whom I give feedback value me.

Those who counsel you may not always be right, but Proverbs 11:14 (NASB) says, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory." So if

you want to be victorious, it's worth the risk of asking and proactively inviting wisdom in.

The truth is we all have blind spots, things we may not even know we need to work on. It's important to get help from others to see them clearly and grow into the callings on our lives. {eoa}