

Mine, Ours or His: How God Uses Negative Role Models

My first paid position in ministry was as a part-time youth **pastor** while I was in seminary. The church had been outstanding at one time, but it was in a long, slow decline. While the pastor was kind to give me the job, he became a negative role model for me.

Young ministers don't always realize they may be able to learn as much from a negative example as from a positive one. Even though an early experience in **ministry** might be negative, if they can survive, they will be OK. They just need to make sure they learn *not* to be like their first "mentor."

The pastor I first served under was a great **preacher**, but he had a strong ego. Everything in the church was his. There is a legitimate use for the expression "my **church**," but with him, it really meant that everything belonged to him. He even introduced me by saying, "I want you to meet my **youth pastor**."

I confess to having a **rebellious** streak that wants to push back at things I don't like. And I would be saying under my breath, "I am not your youth pastor. The reason this church is in trouble and declining is that everything is yours. I am the Lord's youth pastor; this church is His, and it's not yours."

Obviously, I didn't stay there for long. But I never took issue with him in public. My job was not to undermine his **leadership**. If you ever find yourself somewhere that you just can't live with the authority in place, you need to get out.

My negative experience helped shape a good habit in me. When I became a pastor, I tried to avoid using the first-person singular personal pronoun. It was "our church" or "the Lord's church." I introduced staff members as "our youth pastor" or "the youth pastor of the church." I avoided any nomenclature

that suggested everything is mine.

Even bad experiences are good experiences. You may feel beaten down, worn out or even rebellious because of a negative situation, but it offers you a chance to learn. God refines and teaches us through having to **submit**, for instance, to someone who is unfair, egotistical or self-serving. By humbly accepting a less-than-desirable state of affairs, you can grasp valuable **lessons** that might not sink in as well under better circumstances.

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