

'Armor Bearers' and Other Weird Christian Practices That Hinder God's Kingdom

I'll admit, there are many who will read this article and disagree with me on one or all of the points. That's par for the course no matter what topic I address, but I need to make it clear up front that what follows is an opinion piece—yet, I believe it's a valid opinion and one that many in the church world would agree with. I feel it's important to introduce the topic of this article so we can honestly analyze unnecessary cultural additives to the church that are making the mission more challenging.

I personally believe it best to declutter our church structures. Eliminating much of what makes up the construct of the local church would do wonders. I know many are yearning for a church experience that brings focus back to the foundational, governmental purpose of the church—prayer. Check this out from a previous *Ministry Today* magazine article:

I'm on the hunt for what I call Pavement People. These are the 2 Chronicles 7 people who couldn't even enter the building due to the glory of God filling it—so they hit the pavement and worshipped. No comfortable chairs, no music, nothing but them, the pavement and God.

Oh how glorious it would be to turn our Sunday morning church experience into a white-hot furnace of prayer! Clear out the chairs, pace around the perimeter or lie facedown and contend as the groans of Spirit-fueled intercession resound!

Good graphic artists and web designers understand the importance of white space. They add art, graphics, text and other elements only as is absolutely necessary, ensuring that

there is a significant amount of white space—blank space—absolutely nothing added to a large portion of the art board. It's just empty. It gives room to breathe. You can focus on what is most important. We need white space in the church. Eliminate everything but the most important things.

This being said, there are some unnecessary and often times compromising practices that are taking up precious white space, and it's making the mission of the church tougher than it should be.

What Needs to Come to an End in the Church?

Armor Bearers

I absolutely believe in rank and order in the government of the church. I also believe it's important to honor leaders intentionally and to be a very real support. Their arms need to be lifted at times.

However, the armor-bearer culture is all too often dysfunctional and bizarre. While I don't argue that some leaders handle it in a healthy way, I feel it's simply unnecessary in most cases. By design, assigning an armor bearer creates distinction between the leader and the body. Leaders create their own pedestal, climb up on it and expect to be served in front of everyone. If not handled with extreme caution, it stinks of self-promotion.

I've been in ministry for a long time, and while I appreciate the assistance that people offer, the idea of finding an armor bearer, even when others recommend I find one, to be something that would cause more problems than it would relieve. Instead, why not develop a team of secret intercessors who are aggressive in the spirit as they support you from the closet? Nobody has to know, but the support would be supernaturally powerful.

Here's a story that illustrates this point. Several years ago

I was asked to gather a team of intercessors to cover Sarah Palin during one of her tours. I had the privilege of spending quality one-on-one time with her, prophesied over her and heard her heart. With hundreds of people swarming around her, Sarah, her makeup artist and I retreated beyond the intense, Secret-Service type security detail into a small room where we spent the next hour and a half together. It was a God ordained moment. Then, my team of three intercessors who were waiting patiently for us were escorted, along with myself, Sarah and her media director onto her tour bus. That gave us additional private, quality time to pray over her as she prepared to address hundreds of people in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I was the first person off of the bus, and the rest of the team followed. The crowd roared, and the cameras were rolling. Well-known national news personalities had their microphones in hand. It was a media frenzy and quite an experience! We also babysat her son Trig that night as she interacted with the crowd for hours, without an armor bearer in sight.

Later, as I watched some YouTube videos of us stepping off of the bus, people were commenting that we were most likely her bodyguards or support staff. They or nobody would ever know that we were actually Sarah's intercessors, the most important team of people that she made sure surrounded her in every city she visited. Prayer warriors, not armor bearers, are what we need surrounding leaders in the church today.

Excessive spiritual fathering/mothering

I'm sure this point will be met with some indignation. I understand the issue of fatherlessness in the nation today, and while some in the church have addressed it appropriately (and others have ignored it entirely), many have capitalized on this inappropriately. It can get quite strange.

Yes, it's true that we need spiritual fathers and mothers. This is a fact that cannot be debated, and it's fully

scriptural. The problem is when we take a simple truth and turn it into a movement or attempt to overemphasize it in a church culture.

I've had people identify me as their spiritual father, and I'll admit it can be quite awkward. There's often a dysfunctional, codependent feel to it. I understand that people are craving impartation and fatherly/motherly guidance, and I fully affirm that. However, it can get weird when we take it too far. It can reveal insecurity in both the spiritual son/daughter and the spiritual father/mother, who both want to experience relational significance while slapping a spiritual label on it. This is toxic.

I wrote my ebook *Orphans No More!* with this issue in mind. A spirit of insignificance will cause people to look for human fathers and mothers and others who will affirm them instead of drawing their identity from God the Father directly.

Excessive Relational Focus

Today we are seeing a rise in churches that are mostly focused on connecting people—to people. Pastors are mostly focused on developing relational holding tanks for the congregation and creating systems to ensure everybody feels like a part of the family.

Note, I'm not saying connecting people to the church family is wrong. It's the weight of the focus that is out of balance in many churches.

You'll notice many church marketing campaigns, signage, fliers and other forms of communication today are focused mostly on how people will be loved in their new church home, on how they will fit in and on how there's a place for them instead of inviting people to surrender all and encounter the Holy Spirit.

In fact, I dare say that many a pastor, especially those in

the Millennial ranks, are zeroing in on developing a mutual admiration society as they attempt to create an atmosphere filled with warm hugs and an ever-growing community of friends with them right at the center.

I understand this would be an unfair critique if I were labeling all churches as being excessively relational. I am not. What I am doing is bringing light to a troubling trend that needs to stop, and fast.

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this article! {eoa}

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