

Wisdom for the Newly Ordained

I recently participated in a gathering of experienced ministry leaders. The group was convened to share nuggets of wisdom with a young man who was about to be ordained. His wife was also present. The “seasoned” ministry leaders in the room represented multiple denominations, various ministry specialties and different styles of local church ministry. The common denominators were a shared orthodoxy on essential matters and a track record of faithful ministry leadership.

This is a summary of the “Wisdom for the Newly Ordained” as shared in the gathering.

1. Set your priorities in this order: God, wife, children, work. Be a disciple of Jesus first and foremost.
2. Visit the people you minister to in their homes. It may seem old-fashioned, but it’s meaningful to the people you shepherd.
3. Tend to your own soul through word and prayer. Don’t confuse this with the work of preparing sermons or leading in group prayer. Take time out regularly to listen to the Lord.
4. Take your days off and your vacation time. Don’t burn yourself out or cheat your family by neglecting your time off from work.
5. Really love the people you minister to and tell them so regularly. Walk slowly with them rather than hurrying by. Give them your full attention in that moment. If they know you love them, they’re more likely to hear the other things you say and to follow your leadership.
6. Develop good hobbies and friends outside of the church. It’s not healthy for your whole life to be spent inside your own ministry bubble.
7. You will feel overwhelmed at times in ministry. That’s normal; don’t be surprised by it. Open your ears at those times and be teachable.
8. Choose your expectations wisely. Overblown expectations will make you vulnerable to depression when they are unmet.
9. Make faithfulness your definition of success in ministry. Faithfulness to God’s call is what will ultimately matter.

10. Don't play the comparison game. Learn from other ministry leaders, but don't measure the value of your ministry by comparing results with them.

11. Your worth is determined by God's love. The cross forever settles the question of how God feels about you. Anchor your life and ministry in God's love, not the need to impress anyone or climb some career ladder.

12. Have an abundance of counselors. Build your network of peers and mentors. Don't isolate yourself or stop learning. Find good examples and learn from them.

13. Be joyful! Being a joyful person will take you a long way in life and ministry.

14. Answer your phone (unless it's SPAM). Be accessible as a ministry leader.

15. Neither age nor experience is a shield against pride. Watch out for it, especially where your knowledge is concerned. Walk humbly with the Lord and before your congregants.

16. Rely on God, not your giftedness. Otherwise, your greatest talent can become your biggest downfall.

17. Remember your call and to whom you belong. Write a life mission statement and return to it often.

18. Don't compromise your integrity. Once you do, you can't get it back.

19. Be an example of health to those you serve. Be holistic about your health (spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, intellectual).

20. Resist the urge to be the first to speak. Create space for others to speak and create. As the leader, once you speak on a matter others will tend to keep quiet.

21. Find someone who loves you enough to tell you the hard truths. We all need someone like that in our lives.

22. Cultivate self-awareness. Know your tendencies and the impact they have on others.

23. Be a giver, not a taker. Love others in such a consistent way that it can't be ignored.

24. Trust your children to the Lord. He loves them more than you do.

25. Remember that the Lord's Church is bigger than your church. Enjoy the brotherhood of believers from different traditions.

26. Burn the ships! Go all in with your call and the life of pastoring. It's a great life.

27. Marry well. Your spouse will have a big impact on your ministry. (The young ministry candidate we were meeting with has certainly married well. His wife is a ministry leader in her own right.)

28. Point to Jesus always. Make him the main thing, not yourself.

29. Read a lot of dead people (i.e., Christian writers of previous time periods). If their work is still around, it likely has substance.

30. Don't get hung up on worthless, silly arguments that don't matter. Don't get labelled into anyone's army but the Lord's. Keep the main thing the main thing.

31. Be faithful over small things. They all matter. Don't measure the importance of your task by the size of the gathering.