

On the Practice of Ministry Leadership: *The Honey Bee Principles*

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

Proverbs 19:21 (ESV)

I was reading along, minding my own business, when I came across a simple idea that has now taken me in its grip. Taylor Field, in his book [Upside Down Leadership](#), shares an observation by Edward Judson, son of the great missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. In reflecting on his father's work, Edward Judson noted how often ministry leaders end up accomplishing things they did not expect, things they don't even know about or live to appreciate.

As an analogy Judson asks us to consider the honey bee. His goal is honey, but all the while, unbeknown to the bee, he is cross-fertilizing a large variety of plants. Judson then drives home the point about the bee: "The best work he is doing, he knows nothing about" (p 14).

The best work he is doing, he knows nothing about. As I began to consider this idea and its implications for ministry leaders, I will admit to being troubled at first. What about all my strategies? What about all my plans? Am I really so clueless about the long-term significance of my life's work?

Happily, the answer is yes. *The best work I am doing I likely know nothing about.* Once I got over the shock, I felt great relief. I also wondered why I had missed this until now. It isn't a new idea. Proverbs 19:21 essentially says the same thing. Though I have all sorts of plans and goals and ambitions, it is the Lord's intentions that will be ultimately accomplished, intentions that I may not even know about or live to see. To this truth I can only respond as Paul does to the divine mystery - with awe and praise.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! Romans 11:33 (ESV)

Okay, let's try and digest this reality and its implications. We'll call these the Honey Bee Principles for ministry leaders.

1. *It's not all up to you.* It's not even remotely up to you. God is not dependent on your contribution for his plan to be accomplished. He does graciously invite you into his work. He will weave your life's work into his tapestry, but his tapestry is not dependent on your thread. You can receive this as a blow to your ego or as a huge weight off your shoulders. I suggest the latter.

2. *Make your honey.* Like the bee, make your honey as God gives you opportunity. Rejoice in the field of flowers where he has placed you and go about your work faithfully. Remember, though, to

hold your plans loosely. There is always a lot more going on than what you know about. Keep your focus on the Lord and honoring him. He has purposes that you can't fathom.

3. *Find your significance in relationship with Christ, not in accomplishments.* You may make a lot of honey in your life; this will be a temptation to pride. You may be very disappointed in your honey production; this will be a temptation to discouragement. Both pride and discouragement are traps in which the enemy loves to ensnare ministry leaders. He wants you to focus on your success, not on your Savior. If he can accomplish this, the enemy will always have you where he wants you – uncertain, worried, comparing yourself to others, captive to your feelings and ego, and certainly not happy in the Lord. That's a lousy way to live a life, especially a life of ministry leadership. Instead, be content in the Lord, doing what he has called you to do in a way that honors him. Let the Master decide how to distribute the honey; that's above the pay grade of a servant.

4. *Remember that your primary role in life is follower, not leader.* The only value your ministry will have will be to the extent that you follow Jesus. Remember what he said: *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also* (John 12:26a). And remember this bonus: *If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him* (v26b). As a ministry leader, do you want to live the kind of life God honors? Then make Christ-follower your primary vocation as you do your work in the field where he has placed you.

5. *Trust the Lord to accomplish his purposes in you and through you.* Here is your rest, your sabbath as a ministry leader. The Lord is trustworthy. You may not know when or how or with whom, but you can know for sure that when you follow Christ, Christ is at work in you and through you. He is causing his purposes to stand. He is doing things in your soul and through your influence that will matter for eternity. Rest in that. Rest in Him.

Brothers and sisters, *the best work you are doing you probably know nothing about.* I hope your burden feels a little lighter now.