

Watch Out! 7 Practices for Guarding Your Integrity

Ministry leadership is primarily a character calling. When Paul the apostle wrote about the qualifications for church leaders, he majored on character qualities (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9). The only skills mentioned are the ability to teach the faith to others and manage one's household. The rest of the qualifications are about the character of the ministry leader. Based on those qualifications, here are 7 practices that will help guard your integrity and keep you in ministry over the long haul.

1. *Be a practicing, growing disciple.* Read your Bible. Say your prayers. Put the Lord's instructions into practice. Participate in the fellowship of disciples. Abide in Jesus, the True Vine, so that he might produce his fruit in your life (John 15:5). This is the most basic qualification for ministry and the one that fuels all the others.

2. *Be accountable.* Everyone needs someone to report to. It's good for us to have to explain ourselves and give an account of our thinking and actions. Formal accountability structures are valuable. So are informal ones like spouses and trusted mentors. Make sure you have both formal and informal accountability built into your ministry.

3. *Don't make exceptions for yourself.* In other words, don't exempt yourself from policies that others would have to follow in the same ministry area. Particularly where it involves minors or members of the opposite sex, make sure you're following the same rules as everyone else.

4. *Honor processes.* You may be pursuing a worthy goal, but if you do it in a way that tramples on your church's governing documents or the accepted order for decision making then you'll be falling into a trap. Take the time to do things right. You'll get a better outcome and protect your good name at the same time.

5. *Temper your reactions.* Zealously heed James 1:19-20: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness" (CSB). You'll rarely get into trouble by listening too much.

6. *Treat people well.* That includes people inside the church and those on the outside, too. Implement the Golden Rule as a matter of basic practice. No exceptions.

7. *Be extremely careful with money.* This includes both your attitude toward money and the way you handle it. If you want to blow up your ministry, then cultivate an idol of greed in your heart and play fast and loose with church resources. You'll be well on your way to being disqualified!