

# Can Nepotism Destroy A Ministry

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Nep-o-tism = favoritism and patronage based on family relationship. **Proverbs 15:27** “*He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house...*” There appears to be a correlation between greed and nepotism in ministry. When independent ministries are founded by a single person and their families, there is a tendency to think of the ministry in individualistic rather than communal terms. During the early stages of such ministries the musicians, teachers and staff consists of family. As the ministry expands, family members are replaced at the base and move upward toward the seat of power which is the pastoral office. A common trend is to place one’s siblings near the top in order to preserve family lineage.

It is crucial to understand the dynamics and in some instances justifiable reason this is done. In many instances control is the primary motivation for keeping family at the center and the top of the ministry. To be fair it is not wisdom to hold one’s siblings back who too are qualified to lead. On the other hand it is unfair to advance one’s siblings based on kinship and not qualification. Too often it is the latter notion that prevails. When ministry is viewed as personal property rather than the fruit of spiritual labor, it is driven by greed which is a form of idolatry. Once the ministry is fueled and motivated by greed, there are no boundaries or checkpoints sufficient to contain whatever takes place.

Idoltrous greed knows no boundaries. Ministries are devastated because pastors treat the church as personal property by defrauding the ministry of its financial resources through multiple schemes and untold forms of theft. Richard Exley provides us with a trenchant and penetrating analysis of greed and power in his book, **The Peril of Power**. He admonishes that, “*If money is your motive for ministry you are already corrupt even if you never steal one dime.*” I had lunch with Exley circa. 1992 during my brief sojourn as a professor of ethics and theology at Oral Roberts Graduate School of Theology in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was passionately committed to the pastoral ministry and engaging in self-disclosure regarding touchy issues that many people flee. He wrote a couple of challenging reflective pieces in 2009 (Straight From the Heart) titled, **Don’t Ever Fall in Love With the Deal** and **How Does a Pastor Become an Embezzler?** Quoting a friend, “*A deal is like a beautiful woman. Once you fall in love with her you lose all objectivity. Passion takes over, distorting your judgment. Now all you can see are the benefits. You maximize the upside while minimizing or ignoring the downside. You turn a blind eye to the risks.*” Greed de-sensitizes you as you steal small amounts and they begin to increase. Soon you tell yourself that this is just a loan that you will repay until you get caught.

After six decades of ministry I have observed good friends destroy their ministry by promoting their family members over persons who were far more deserving and qualified for a particular position in ministry. I have observed leaders promote better qualified individuals upstairs to a better position including a church in order to make way for their unqualified, unstable, unsaved, untrained children to move in the line of succession. I have observed qualified people not only leave the ministry, but in some instances, leave the faith due to unfair treatment.

Nepotism in the Body of Christ is a cancer that needs to be surgically removed before it impacts negatively the entire ministry. I have observed ministries where the pastoral leaders

family dominated every facet of congregational life. 1.) Nepotism is wrong because it is grounded in conflict of interest. 2.) Nepotism is wrong because it rewards family over true servant-hood. 3.) Nepotism is wrong because it promotes unnecessary conflict in the ministry based on favoritism. 4.) Nepotism is wrong because it sends the wrong message to the undeserving and penalizes the faithful. 5.) Nepotism assigns worth to unqualified persons based on family relationship. 6.) Nepotism can make victims adversarial. 7.) Nepotism is based on false assumptions.

It is not enough to describe the cancer in the Body of Christ, but to find a way to remove the malignant cells from the fellowship. If you are part of a ministry where nepotism is the norm, find a way to confront it in the spirit of courage and humility. 1.) Pray for an opportunity to bring it to the leaders attention with another person. Some leaders do what they see other leaders do and continue the behavior because no one has the courage to address same. 2.) Try to envision nepotism as another satanic distraction to further divide the ministry. 3.) Seek for a way to promote unity rather than disunity in the ministry where you serve. 4.) Make sure that within your heart you are committed to addressing the wrong thing (nepotism) for the right reasons. 5.) Seek to encourage those who have been hurt by nepotism within the fellowship. 6.) Seek to promote a sense of community and bonding within the ministry where you serve. 7.) Oppose favoritism in any form within the Body of Christ in the name of Jesus Christ.

Many of the financial scandals from Small Town USA to Wall Street are tied to family wealth misappropriated over a period of time based on a misuse of same. We live in an imperfect world under judgment. Pastoral leaders are expected to be light in dark places. Nepotism is in essence a misuse of power for selfish reasons. **Galatians 6: 7 (KJV)** is irrefutable: *“Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”* **JB Phillips** translates this passage as follows: *“Don’t be under any illusion, you cannot make a fool of God.”* If your ministry is grounded in God it does not belong to you. You are only called to be steward of the mysteries of God’s grace. Pastoral Leaders, is it worth your soul to oppose the will of God to appease your undeserving family because of your obstinate pride?

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