

People who resist

ONE OF THE MOST FRUSTRATING EXPERIENCES A LAY PASTOR HAS TO DEAL WITH IS A PERSON (OR HOUSEHOLD) WHO RESPONDS TO THE FIRST CONTACT WITH RESISTANCE. THEIR FIRST QUESTION IS, "WHAT DO I DO?" ONE OF THE FIRST THOUGHTS MAY BE, " I MUST BE A FAILURE." ADMITTEDLY, LAY PASTOR FACES. GOD KNOWS ALL ABOUT RESISTANCE. FOR MOST CASES HE WILL HELP A LAY PASTOR BREAK THROUGH IT, TRANSFORMING RESISTANCE INTO RELATIONSHIP.

Why do some people resist lay pastoring initiatives? There are several possible reasons, many of which you can only guess at because of the distance the resisting people keep themselves from you. One or more of the following list is probably the reason you are experiencing resistance:

1 Timid Some people are not open to you because they are not open to any new relationships or are at least very cautious about getting involved with another "friend." This is their nature. They are just plain timid so it is much easier for them to say no to you than to risk acquaintance with someone they don't already know or know well.

2. Fear Some people have been "burned" by folks they trusted or church programs they initially liked. They are fearful of trying another. They believe it is safer to say no than to again risk a bad experience. For them, no involvement guarantees no disappointment or problem.

3. Unacquainted They do not know what this new ministry or relationship is. They are not certain of what is expected of them. They have no way of knowing the benefits of being prayed for regularly and having someone there for them. Their lack of knowledge is not due to not being told, but to their difficulty of "hearing."

4. Spiritual Simplicity Many Christians have to grow spiritually and are like a child who, while growing older, has not matured in other ways. The offer of Christen love and friendship is a threat to their present level of spiritual life. They have not yet accepted the fact that they have been born into a family, that they have become a member of a body; so they resist the approach of a brother or sister who only wants to love them, be in touch with them and pray for them. They find it more comfortable to leave things as they are. The fact is, they don't want their vocational pastor to get too close either.

5. Ego Their feelings and thoughts are that they do not need a lay pastor. They are

doing O'K. as they are. They are active in church, growing spiritually and have many christian friends. "Assign someone who needs a lay pastor," they may say. They come close to resenting the ideas that someone thinks they need a lay pastor.

6. Subconscious Neither you nor they know why they are not open to having a lay pastor. The reasons beyond the mental horizon. If pressed for a reason they would have no explanation for not wanting someone from church to enter their lives as their lay pastor. That's just the way it is and they are not ready at this time to change. Their lay pastor is at a loss to understand way.

when they encounter resistance, lay pastors often come to one or more of these three false conclusions:

1. These people don't need a lay pastor.
2. They are rejecting me. They would accept someone else.
3. Let's pastor only those who want a lay pastor.

The following three responses correct the three faulty conclusions, number for number:

1. Everybody needs pastoring. Every man, woman, boy and girl needs someone praying for them regularly and in other ways caring about them. The gospel is for all whether all accept it or not. The same is true of pastoral care. God charges us to tend his flock, to care for his people. He knows they need tending even though they don't know it and are not asking for it. If we are to serve God we must commit ourselves to care about his people during the time they are not aware of their need.

2. They are resisting the ministry, not you. I resist sales people coming to my door. It doesn't make any difference who the salesperson is, I resist their efforts. I am not rejecting a particular person. I am resistant to welcoming into my house all salespersons ringing my doorbell. In the same way, you just happen to be the one God has chosen to be "love with skin on it" to this household. They are resisting your caring initiative, not you.

3. The third erroneous conclusion is corrected by the responses just given, but we must add a very important principle: people who do not want a lay pastor in all likelihood need a lay pastor more than those who are open to you. Therefore, the challenge is to find ways to pastor these people in spite of their being closed or partially closed to you.

So, how does one pastor a person who resists? Here is an example which helps to

understand how you can pastor a person who is not open to you. Early in my ministry my wife belonged to a group in the church who had "Secret pals." Without being seen, char's secret pal would surreptitiously contact her through cards, letters, little favors and even phone calls with a disguised voice on her birthday, anniversary and holidays. She even contacted her at times when there was no reason except to let her know that she was thinking of her. It was all done out of sight. There was no visible contact. Char did not know who it was until the day of revelation, the annual "Secret pals party." of course, char also was a secret pal to someone and was doing the same kind of creative things for her throughout the year.

Your relationship with your resister is neither secretive nor deceptive but you can do a lot of pastoring without them knowing what is going on. The pastoring commitment you make is to "P A C E" your people;

Pray for them regularly,
Available to them,
Contact them regularly,
Example, be an example to them

You can do all four of these pastoring functions before they accept you and without a person-to-person contact. Let's see how:

PRAY You can pray for your people regularly without either their permission or request. When you make a brief contact by phone or mail, it is good to tell them you are praying for them, that you want things to be going well for them. According to Billy Graham, in a TV interview December 30, 193, even presidents of the United States want to be prayed for. your resisters may not affirm you when you tell them you are praying for them but you can assume their gratitude. The challenges through the days, months and even years of resistance is to be faithful to you commitment to pray regularly for them.

AVAILABLE They already have the information about your availability because they received a letter telling them you are their lay pastor. Your attempted contact reinforces that. The brochure, enclosed with the letter, spells out clearly your availability to them. The rest is up to you. In your heart you need to be ready to be there for them when a crisis such as being hospitalized hits or when they begin to lessen their resistance. Your faithfulness in praying is the key to being available. It keeps you ready.

CONTACT Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and other special occasions give good reason to contact them by card, letter, phone or appropriate gift. on valentine's Day

one lay pastor took a large, and I mean large, valentine cookie to each of her households, including the resisting one. Another, a husband and wife, took a poinsettia to their people at christmas. creative ideas for contact will come out of your talking with other lay pastors and, even more so, out of your time of prayer. It might help at this point, to re-read my earlier example of secret pals.

EXAMPLE Your backing off, while not backing out, from the resisting person so as to be a blessing rather than an irritant will make you an example of one who is sensitive and respectful of their wishes. Your infrequent and gentle contacts will make you an example of one who is persistent in love. Somehow they will know you are one who loves the Lord, loves your church and loves them. What an instructive example you can be even though you are at the peripheral of their life!

The challenge to you is not to give up, not to get discouraged or disgusted, not to back out, not to fall for one or more of the erroneous conclusions others have made and not to be delinquent in fulfilling the commitment you made to your church and to God to care for his people. Even those who resist. Persistence is the word. Hebrews 10:35 & 36 galvanize me to continue doing what God is calling me to do and it should do the same for you:

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

combining Hebrews 11:27 with 12:2 the same for me:

"He (Moses) persevered because he saw him who is invisible . . . Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the originator and perfecter of our faith."

Second to the scriptures through which God speaks to us and prayer whereby God counsels us, there is a startling principle which takes us by surprise and informs us about the dynamics of resistance and supplies the energy for persistence through the months or years of rejection. This is the principle: often people do not know what they need until someone comes along and offers it to them.

After accepting what is offered, they discover that it feels good, that they are comfortable with it and even ask, "How did I get along without this before?" They absorb it like sponges. We all know the principle. For example, I didn't know how comfortable a down-filled coat was and how warm it would keep me in the Minnesota winters until my wife, after a few years of patient and persistent urging,

persuaded me to buy one. Now I really wonder how I got along without it before!

People who at first resist accepting a lay pastor, but who eventually break through the resistance find out how good it is to have someone who is praying for them and caring about them. They did not know what they were missing until love began to get through. There are many illustrations and examples of this.

The first is the Gospel. How many people have resisted coming to Christ for years, only to discover at the break-through that they had been missing the best of life. Now, instead of avoiding the people who prayed for them and witnessed to them they are eternally grateful to them for their persistence.

Next, a life-situation illustration. Years ago, an elder in a church I pastored, sympathized with me about my bleak financial future. He knew the church paid only a subsistence salary, that it was impossible to lay much away for retirement. He cared in a helpful way. He told me of a sure investment. I resisted. It seemed impossible for me to get together the minimum requirement of what seemed like a large sum of money. Besides that, I just was cared and he was persistent. Finally the breakthrough. Putting more confidence in him than either in the company or my judgments, my wife and I scraped together every penny we had and invested. After several years it paid off ten-fold, giving us an adequate financial base for the rest of our lives. Stan Johnson had love. He had patience. He persisted in caring about me while I persisted in resistance. You wouldn't believe the creative reasons I gave him for not wanting to follow his recommendation. Now I literally don't know what I would do if he had given up on me. I know the principle well: often people do not know that they need until someone comes along and offers it to them.

Another personal experience underscores that principle. My first response to Ron Rand was "no" when he asked me if I would consider a position on the staff of College Hill Presbyterian Church. This was in 1976. We were both attending a conference at Wheaton College. Ron had been a member of the staff for some time and the church was looking for a Minister of pastoral care. I told him I was satisfied with my ministry as pastor of the Randolph Heights Presbyterian church in St. Paul, Minnesota. The next day at the cafeteria he asked me again. "I don't think so; I'm sufficiently challenged where I am," was my response. He was persistent. The next day, again at lunch, he asked me to pray about it. I countered by asking him to write me a letter about it.

Ron was the example of what a lay pastor can do with a resister. He was loving. He took the initiative. His persistence was tempered with sensitivity and respect. He followed through. I ended up on the staff of that church. It took only a few days for

me to be overwhelmed with what I had been missing and what I would have continued to miss if Ron had not taken the initiative and followed the initiative with persistence. It opened a period of great growth in my life and ministry, part of which was developing the Lay pastors Ministry and writing the book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*, which has carried this model for congregational care to the often people do not know what they need until someone comes along and offers it to them.

The next example is the experience of one of the lay pastors at Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. The lay pastor is Young lady. She phoned one of her newly appointed flock, who was also a young lady, to make an appointment to get together for the first visit. She met resistance. "I don't was told. It was flat rejection. But the lay pastor prayed and contacted her resister by phone occasionally to see how she was doing. But she was repeatedly rejected. A long time after the first rejection the girl hit a crisis. Immediately she was open to her lay pastor. She was anxious for her to come and help her past the crisis. Her lay pastor was there for her and saw her through some very difficult months. She did not know what she needed until her lay pastor come along and offered it to her with patience, prayer and perseverance.

The reality of resistance, understanding the reasons, knowing how to lovingly and creatively respond and awareness of the proven principle that often people do not know what they need until someone comes along and offers it to them all lead to four things one must know when caring about one of God's people who resists your caring initiatives:

1. know that you have something they need – love with skin on it.
2. know that you must preserve in giving them what they need: P. A. C. E.
3. know that you have to find a way to give it to them: –Continue to take the initiative. –Be prayerful, patient, persistent, sensitive and respectful.
4. Know that there will be a breakthrough. know that at that time they will discover how much they needed and wanted what you had to give, "love with skin on it." It's what God wanted them to have. He chose you to give it, no matter what the cost.