



Lesson 10 Know Yourself

Know yourself. Learn your strengths and weaknesses, so that you draw from your strengths and make appropriate compensation for your weaknesses in your interactions with others

I am a mild-mannered, reserved person. I find it difficult to strike up conversations with strangers, especially when "off my turf." When new to a committee, or attending a meeting where I have not already established ties, I am typically quiet and seemingly aloof. As discussion begins, I speak little if at all. I use to get anxious about my reservedness, but I've come to be at peace with it and now rely on it as a strength. For in time, I will speak, and the very fact that I have been quiet through much of the discussion lends my words greater attention, if only out of surprise that I am speaking.

I lack the gift of gab. My silence can cause people to feel awkward around me. I can be an extremely boring car passenger. On the other hand, my silence is a tonic to someone needing peaceful silence. And the same behavior that seems cold and aloof to one person in one circumstance, can be soothing and warm to another person in another situation. Where there is stress in a room, I bring a sense of peace; where there is tension, my personality is a relaxing influence. So I use that strength to mediate conflict and to pastor people in distress.

But what about situations that call for someone with energy and a strong personality? I compensate. I find such a person to assist me or take my place altogether. I depend a lot on my wife in social situations to make introductions and carry conversations. Again, where I am weak, I find someone with the appropriate strength or knowledge or experience to compensate. This is what being part of the body of Christ is about. God has given us different gifts, temperaments, and abilities so by working together we can minister effectively.

We can have proper perspective of others when we appreciate their strengths. When I was school principal, one of my teachers was poor at organizing. He would forget to fill out proper forms, causing administrative problems for me and the school secretary. She once asked me how I put up with such things. I replied that I focused on what I value in him – he loved his students and went the extra mile for them. I could compensate for



his poor organizational skills, but not for what mattered most in a teacher – love for his students.

Value your ministry team members for what each brings to that ministry. Why get upset because your best greeter gets too involved talking with a guest and forgets his other assignment to set up equipment? Find someone else to do such tasks – perhaps someone for whom having to speak to strangers is a heart-thumping exercise.

Know your limits. Don't take on a task when you are tired. Don't try to mediate a conflict when you are stressed. You are likely to make matters worse. Pace yourself; set boundaries. Knowing your limits and setting proper boundaries are essential principles when you are involved in ministry. Just as we would not want to be pulled over by an irritable patrolman, so we do not want to be in the room with an exhausted and stressed ministry leader whose mood impacts everyone around him.

It is okay to take breaks, to turn a task over to someone else. You do not have to always take the hardest pastoral case or mediate the most difficult conflict. Sometimes you simply need to stop and get a good night's rest. I recall in seminary listening to a missionary boast that he had never taken a day off; I wondered then how his wife sitting next to him felt about that. I am quite certain now that such a boast is a foolish one.

Know the task given you, keep focused on it, and do it well. Let others do their work. You do not need to give advice about everything on which you have an opinion. If you are a ministry leader, and you give an assignment, it is proper to provide guidance; but if you have chosen someone for his particular ability, then give him the freedom to exercise his gift accordingly. Use judgment as to when it is okay for your people to make mistakes and to learn by experience what you may already know is best.

I recruit Bill to set up tables and chairs for a dinner. I advise him on the most efficient method of doing the job. But Bill thinks he already knows the best way. My method would have taken 15 minutes; he ends up taking 30 minutes. But we had a full hour to be ready. What was lost by letting Bill do it his way? He learned by experience that he did not have the best system and thus will be better at the job the next time. I, meanwhile, can still be about doing the work I need to get done. I am not frustrated with him, nor he with me. If I had insisted on my way, he may have been offended or stressed and still have taken longer because his heart was not in the work. If his method really



bothered me, it would be wise for me to leave the room. I then won't be bothered by his routine, and he doesn't have to feel my sullen glare. As an added benefit, Bill might find a better way to accomplish the task that I knew was best.

Again, know your limits. But also know and lean on your strengths. If you lead a ministry team, how can you best motivate your people? If extroverted and a dynamic speaker, speaking to your people as a team may be most effective in motivating them for the group task. If reserved and soft-spoken, you may be more effective gently encouraging your crew members one-on-one. Both leadership styles can be effective. The best leader draws from his true character. One inspirational leader can have his audience yelling out cheers; another can hold the same audience in quiet intensity as they listen to his calm voice.

Know who you are – your personality, your strengths and weaknesses. Above all, know theologically who you are in Christ. You may think you do, but you may be operating from some other heart-felt belief. Do you know that God delights in you? Do you know that he is not angry with you and is not measuring you by your ministry achievements? Do you know that because you are his child in Christ, he is causing everything to work for your good? The better you grasp these theological realities and operate from such a vantage point, then the wiser you become as you lead your ministry and relate to others.

I should add a word for the young. Don't settle too soon on what your limits might be. Lack of experience is not the same as lack of potential. Stretch yourselves; try out new roles, and locations, and ministries. The worst that can happen is that you fail. You will be fine, as long as you recognize that it's all right to fail at a few things; that does not make you a failure. Indeed, such stumbling can cause you to grow in wisdom and ability. The fool is the one who keeps trying to force himself into a role that clearly does not fit. The wise person knows when to persevere in a difficult experience and when to move on.

Even then, be careful of forming wrong conclusions. Many young men have left the ministry because they failed in their first ministry assignment. They did not understand the role of circumstances in both success and failure. We see this in sports all the time. One man is a successful coach at one school but fails at another. What changed



– the coach? No – the circumstances. He was a good fit for one school that presented a particular set of circumstances; but he was the wrong fit under another set of circumstances.

Again, I think it is fine to acknowledge failure; it is akin to humility. But let failure sharpen your understanding of your true strengths so that you are made all the more useful for God. Don't let failure identify you. There is nothing wrong with our pride getting hurt; but there is everything wrong with our fruitfulness being wasted because we permit failure to cloud our understanding rather than sharpen it.

Know yourself. Know your limits and your strengths. Know who you are in Christ. Stretch yourself through new experiences, but more importantly learn from those experiences. Accept failure but only to make you stronger and more secure in who you are and what your true gifts are. As you act out of your true self and out of true understanding of your relationship to Christ, you will act with godly wisdom.