



By Pastor Benjamin Conway

1. Loyalty

One of the most important keys in living a successful life is learning the principles behind loyalty. We live in a generation which has largely forgotten the principles of loyalty – and therefore has forgotten the keys to qualification to success. In a day in which people denigrate local churches, rebel against legitimate authority and hate being led; it is important to grasp loyalty.

Loyalty is the number one qualification to minister. An immature person believes that gifting is the door opener to ministry, but that is not true. When you mature, you discover that faithful and loyal people are the best leaders. An immature person would think that being a nice guy makes for the best pastor, that being a skilful orator makes for the best preacher. But the Scripture could not be more clear:

IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS, THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL (LOYAL) (1 Corinthians 4.2).

The pastors in the **Tree of Life Church** network are not promoted for their good looks, friendly nature or preaching gifts. They are promoted because they are loyal. Loyal people are the best gifts a church can have.

Jesus said that you will know you are His disciples not by gifting or anointing but by love. Loyalty is a form of love – and people are attracted to loyal people. Church people are not blind. They are not deaf. They can tell if you are discordant. They can feel if you are disloyal. If the water is murky – the sheep will not go near it. And then you are frustrated that you are not moving forward in ministry, but you don't know there is no crocodile in the waters unless they are still waters.

There are several manifestations of disloyalty but the main one is criticism. Disloyalty leads to you noticing and magnifying faults. In the church you find fault with the preaching, with the order of service, with the building, with the systems, with the people, with the structure of the church.

Just like Miriam became critical of Moses: it was by following Moses she got free from Egypt. It was by following Moses she was no longer a slave. It was by Moses that she was redeemed. But now all she could see was Moses' faults and flaws. She spoke out publicly about Moses' marriage. She criticised him out loud. Disloyalty has a voice.

“And Miriam spoke against Moses” (Numbers 12.1)

Disloyal people are like eagles' looking for faults. Scrutinizing the church to find fault. They create an atmosphere that can break a church into pieces. Disloyalty can destroy a church faster than anything else. If people are insecure and aren't comfortable in a place, they will rather than look at themselves and challenge themselves will look for someone to blame. That happens a lot in churches – if you are pastor, don't beat yourself up over it. Don't try and please everyone – that's called the number one way to ensure you never have a church over 100. People will always threaten to leave if you take their ministry away, change to songs they don't like, or lead them forward.

Your point of view depends on your viewpoint. If you are looking for faults you will find them. If you are looking with critical eyes you will always find something to criticise. If you look with loving eyes, you will always find something to love.

Absalom could only see the deficiencies of David's kingship. But the problem was in his eyes.

Doctors make oaths to respect their teachers, but people in churches sometimes get a little success and a little promotion and forget who loved them there, who helped them there, who taught them what they know. The deception of disloyalty is that it makes people think they don't need leadership anymore, that they don't need help, that God's structures don't work because of a small problem in the system.

Our goal in the **Tree of Life Church** is to create a culture of loyalty. That we all have a reverence and genuine love for leadership. That we grasp what it takes to move forward as the body of Christ.

So, how can we develop that culture. Here are three simple keys that will help you develop a culture of loyalty:

1. The NORTH WIND face

“The north wind drives away rain; so does an angry face drive away a biting tongue” (Proverbs 25.23)

The first key is when you hear someone biting, someone running down the church, the leaders, the people, the building, the service: give them a facial expression that shuts them up. Show someone clearly you are not interested in their gossip and their conversation. This will deter most of the problem straight away. This will create a culture of loyalty and unity. If people realize disloyal talk is not welcome, then they will cease from it.

Sometimes disloyal talk is about flattering you to put someone else down. Don't fall for it. “Oh the only reason I am at this church is because of you” is nice to hear but it will puff you up and divide the church. Give them a withering look. It works!

They said of David he killed his tens of thousands when he had only killed one. Don't fall for your own press!

Gossip is a KILLER. We still haven't accepted it, we still don't believe it. We happily roast people for dinner and happy go out for coffee and feast on the bones of our colleagues, family and church members.

2. Don't go somewhere your heart isn't in

If you are in a church, especially if in leadership, and your heart isn't in it, remove your body as well. It helps! You can't change a church from within, you can only split it!

“A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENS THE WHOLE LUMP” (1 Cor. 5.6)

One disgruntled elder can pollute the whole church. Never manipulate people to stay in your Living Church, in your group, in the Tree of Life if their heart is gone. Let them go. It's that simple.

Some pastors are too soft to remove disloyal, grumbling, divisive people. They don't protect the sheep from being polluted.

I'm not talking about leaving because you are having a carnal fit. People do that to churches all the time. I'm talking about you know the vision isn't your vision but you are there to "help" the leadership. Get over yourself – God has a place for you where you will fit in – it won't be perfect but it will be real. Most people don't leave when their visions clash, but hold on until they are well and truly offended, storm off and never go to church again. Get a grip – harness those emotions and realize who you are!

3. Set fire to some stuff

In Acts 28 they built a fire, and a snake came out of the fire when it was lit. They picked up a snake thinking it was a harmless stick. But when the fire came the snake jumped out.

Some people look lovely and harmless and wonderful, but when fire comes you find out they are snakes. You change a procedure, ban a certain song, don't let them lead something the way they want to and they bite. Trials and difficulties reveal people's nature. The truth is that anyone who wants to do God's will ends up getting bitten – it happened to Jesus, to Paul, to all people.

Do not be in a hurry to promote people. Try not promoting them – try taking their responsibilities away from them for a while. That kind of fire reveals people's hearts. If they were disloyal because you didn't promote them, rejoice – they would have taken the position and used it as a platform to be disloyal.

A person's reaction to change is a revelation of their character.

These THREE things will help all of us walk in the unity that God has for us. There is a lot in this post, but if you take it to heart it will lift you and help you be all you can be.

2. Loyalty: Fully Persuaded

Last week we discussed loyalty and how to maintain loyalty in a church or organization. Today I want to continue that thought by discussing something called “fully persuaded”. I think most people have realized that to be a leader means to be accused. If you are in leadership, the only way to stop them talking about you is to quit leading – so get used to it. You have to be able to handle accusation.

If you are part of an organization you have to also be able to handle accusations made at your leaders. It is not without good reason that the Bible says not to entertain an accusation against an elder without two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5.19). If there is just one lone voice against a leader, ignore it. It’s that simple.

Jesus was accused of misleading people, teaching sedition, preventing people from paying taxes, claiming to be the king, being in league with satan. I’m not sure many of us today would have become his follower in 1st century Israel. Paul was accused of being a pestilent fellow, a source of strife, a disturber of the peace, an antinomian, a cult leader and attempting to desecrate the temple.

If you were working with Paul you would have to be fully persuaded about his integrity and character. Otherwise those accusations would find a hook inside you and you would lose the benefits of Paul’s leadership. Of course this is why leaders are falsely accused – to diminish their influence, and to ensure you fail to benefit from their influence.

Can you imagine working with Paul and at the back of your mind is the idea that he is a cult leader, that you are in a cult, that he really wanted to desecrate the temple? It wouldn’t work. You need to be fully persuaded that Paul is an apostle of God and the messenger of grace.

People say there is no smoke without fire, forgetting that some people in any organizations (sadly, especially churches) can be human smoke machines, puffing out smoke by the gallon with no fire necessary at all. You need to be fully persuaded that you are in the right place with the right leadership!

So, let’s start by addressing leaders with some points, then we will address the led with some more points!

5 THINGS LEADERS CAN DO TO MAKE IT EASY FOR THEIR PEOPLE TO BE FULLY PERSUADED

1. Be open about finances. You get a new car and someone asks “where did that come from?” Don’t reply “The Lord” – we all know that, but let people know where it came from. Let people see that you are not skimming from the offerings. Make sure that you are registered as a charity, and complete the appropriate paperwork to stay above board. You don’t need to reveal where every

penny is spent, but people should be aware of the broad strokes. It makes it easier to persuade them and help them if you are accused.

2. Be open about your vision. A pastor recently wanted to work with me on an evangelism project. I told him it wouldn't work because we disagreed about too many core issues. He lied to me about what he believed about Jesus and about the gifts of the Spirit and salvation to try and get me to work for him. I listened to him preach and pointed out the dishonesty to him – what he preached was not what he told me he believed. Why lie? To get our church on board, to add some sort of weight to his campaign? I don't know. But it is difficult to be persuaded to work with someone who is dishonest about their core values. Let the church know what you are all about and where you see the church going. Don't tell someone “yes, we are going to have services like this” when you don't want to. People will see right through it. Shout the vision, make it plain and let people decide if they are going to follow. Presenting different visions to different people to keep them around will always bring DI-VISION!
3. Be open in crisis times. An elder in the church is being disruptive and rude – won't teach what you ask, and starts insulting guest speakers and is insulting to other elders and their abilities. When you remove that person from leadership, ensure people know it was done and why it was done. Be open about the tough decisions you have to make, and be open as to why they are tough. I'm not talking about gossip, I'm not talking about running someone down and getting your side of the story out. I'm talking about being transparent about why you made certain choices. Let people know that you have their best interests at heart.
4. Have greater leaders than you that you are open with and honest with. When people see that you are led too, that you are growing too, that you care about developing too, then they will trust you a lot more. People care a lot less about knowing everything and attacking everything if they know there is a place that your struggles and your concerns are being shared and that they are being shared with someone who is wise and mature.
5. Be open about your mistakes. I'm not saying get in the pulpit and share every wrong selfish kill-em-all thought you ever had, I am saying that if you mess it up publically, apologize publically. If you get shirty one Sunday before church, let people know that you did and that you know you did and that you are sorry.

It is hard in this day and age to cultivate loyalty but these steps will make it easier for people to follow you.

5 THINGS THE LED CAN DO TO HELP STAY FULLY PERSUADED AND LOYAL

1. If the questions are too many, get out. I am not saying here stay in a church when things are clearly dysfunctional. Don't do that. If you cannot get answers or even feel that you will get them, then find somewhere else. Get a new job or new church or whatever.
2. Remember to stay loyal to the highest authority. What does this mean – if your elder starts contradicting your pastor then go with the pastor and his call. He founded and built the church. If

your branch manager is contradicting your regional manager, go with the regional manager. If your pastor is contradicting Christ, Christ is the highest authority. Stay with Him! Paul said follow me as I follow Christ – that’s good advice for any leader: when they are not following Christ don’t follow them! A good leader will say that as well.

3. Do not withhold information from your leader. If there is corruption going on, let people know. If you knew sedition was going on and said nothing, you are disloyal. Paul told the Corinthians “it is reported that there is fornication among you” (1 Corinthians 5.1) – it wasn’t a word of knowledge or a vision. Someone told Paul the church was dysfunctional! A good structure reports on things! Good people let their leaders know what is going on.
4. Base your loyalty on principles not emotions. Most people operate in the emotional realm most of the time, and don’t operate on the basis of principle. If you decide to be part of something you make that decision on information and principles and vision, not on the basis of emotion. I know people who followed a youth pastor who split a church and started a new church across the road. I asked why they would follow him when it was all clearly out of order. They said “we know he has done wrong, but we feel sorry for him”. I can’t think of a worse reason to be part of a church. Those who joined Absalom’s church all died. The angels who joined Lucifer Ministries International all became devils. Be careful where you go and who you are loyal to.
5. Be prepared to pay “The Loyalty Cost”. Being loyal will cost you – friends, relationships, parties to go, and more. Everything has a price – your salvation had a price but you didn’t have to pay it. But every step you take in working out your great salvation will cost you. Of course the good news is that the reward is greater than the price. However, there is a cost to loyalty. To be loyal to one person means you cannot be loyal to everyone. To be loyal to one church means you cannot be loyal to every church. I have friends I just can’t spend time with any more. Why? Because I am loyal to Jesus. I am loyal to the Tree of Life Network. Every relationship you are in either adds to you or diminishes you, and you can only choose so many. When Moses decided to be loyal to God he lost access to the riches of Pharaoh. There are people I have lost access to their riches because I have decided to do the right thing. Loyalty is expensive but it will always pay better than the cost.

3. Loyalty: An Analysis of Loyalty

So far, we have discussed how to stay loyal, how to engender loyalty and that loyalty truly is the number one component to a successful ministry. Today we are going to focus on the quality of loyalty – what it looks like and how to recognize it.

The truth that everyone must realize is that if loyalty is one of the key ingredients of a successful life then loyalty will always always always be challenged and tested. When your loyalty to someone is attacked or challenged or rocked, you need to consider what information you have, where it comes from and you also need to consider your own heart too.

Firstly, you must analyze the past. Paul to Timothy “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1.6). In other words, Paul said “Timmy, remember your gift comes from me and my ministry.” Timothy was a young man in danger of deviating from his call and losing his destiny. So Paul reminded him of the past. You too need to consider your past. Remember the things the Spirit has shown you. Remember the people who prayed for you when your marriage was a mess, when you lost your job, when things looked bleak. Most people are disloyal because they don’t think about the past.

I will never forget how inspired I was by Will Graham, pastor of [Victory Church International](#), as I heard him preach for the first time in August 1998. As I heard him preach about his vision of church planting and impacting Europe for the gospel and God’s unconditional love, and having conferences that invited the entire five fold. I fell in love with the message and I will always honour the man. That sermon is re-played in my mind again and again. I remember that message. Because of that I am loyal to Will- – he is always the first person I invite to our conferences. What you remember determines your loyalty. If you are disloyal it is often because you have forgotten where your gifts and vision came into flame and who helped you fan the flames.

A few years ago someone told me to be careful around a certain preacher because they lacked integrity. I laughed and told them “you don’t realize that this person is my friend, we go back a long time.” I am not going to listen to mindless gossip about my friends – it’s called loyalty. How do I do it? I remember how that person has helped me, counseled me, been there at 2am when I was falling apart. Remember who stirred your gifts up! Remember who imparted wisdom to you!

Secondly, you need to analyze the person. Paul told Timothy: “continue in the things you have learned... knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Tim. 3.14). When people invent seditious stories and slanderous reports, think carefully about what they are saying. Analyze the person concerned and see if it makes sense. Someone accused me of being in ministry for the money. If you believed that you failed to

use your brain: you failed to analyze! I had a place in five different universities to study medicine, I had a lucrative career in the city, I was offered a phenomenal job writing computer code, I was offered a place on a think tank. There are many different ways I could have earned more money than what I do right now. I did not give up on several awesome careers to be counting people's pennies and making a living that way for the money – I did it because of the call on my life. A little analysis would show this to be obvious!

Paul told Timothy: “you know my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions...” (2 Tim. 3.10f). It amazes me when people who know you personally are swayed by someone who doesn't know you at all. They forget your generosity, they forget your goodness, they forget the hours you spent loving them, praying for them, how much money you gave them, how you have put up with things over and over and fixate on a bit of gossip and end up being disloyal. Loyalty comes from analysis, disloyalty comes from a carnal reaction. Before being disloyal, stop, think, and think again.

Nearly every minister – in fact every person – I have heard negative things about when I finally got to know them I found they were nothing like the rumours. Get to know people personally!

Thirdly, analyze the words you hear someone speaking. “Hold fast the sound words, which you hast heard of me” (2 Tim. 1.13). You must always double check what you hear a pastor preaching or anyone saying to you. Is it accurate? Is it Biblical? Also think about what someone is saying now compared to what they used to say – some start off on the Bible then deviate and go onto some seriously weird teachings. When a preacher defects from the Word, you should defect from that preacher. When the church leaves the Word (and goes into barking, clucking, screaming, shaking and whatever), then leave that church! We have to consider people: are they honest, are they gossips, are they critical, are they mean? Analyze! Consider!

Analyze the people bringing rumours and gossip – are they silly, mean people? Are they living for Christ, are they ministering with life and fruit? If not, why listen to their gossip and rumours? Why let unfruitful people stop you being fruitful?

The reason many people are unfruitful is because they don't stop and analyze what is going on. They forget people, they think wrong things because they are moved by rumours and so on. The lie runs around the world before the truth is even dressed. The weeds grow faster than the grass – but stand on the Word, analyze what is going on and make good choices. That way leads to success.

4. Loyalty: Recognizing Seeds of Disloyalty (I)



It is difficult to tell who will be loyal and who will stab you into the back. Sometimes someone will swear blind they don't know then go on to be your best leader (like Peter), others you give all the jobs to and they then are the ones who betray you (Judas). However, there are clues and one of the first clues is what I refer to as an independent attitude.

An independent attitude never seems to fit in with the group. They might be a little upset at the leader, they might be annoyed at someone in the group, or just generally upset with the way the group does things. They might have started out keen but there is something different going on now: an independent attitude has taken root.

It's a subtle first sign to a betrayal, but it is as real as can be and you need to be able to spot it. It could

manifest in a number of ways: the pastor of a church could say "let's all fast this Wednesday" and the person fasts Tuesday. That sounds minor but let me tell you this: always be careful around people who take no notice of the calendar or the clock.

This week it was independence day in Uganda. They celebrated, we didn't here in England. Why? Because we are a different nation. We don't follow each others' calendars and clocks. When people are part of the same group, they follow the same calendar. It's a really simple way to notice who is loyal and who is not. Not following the calendar: it's not a big deal, but it is the first step down a slippery slope that ends with you getting a knife to the back!

I am not against being independent and I am not against people having an independent attitude, the issue is that when you want to be part of something bigger than yourself – which is the only way to find true significance – you have to join in in such a way that you flow with the group, the church, the business, the organization. You can't play by your own rules and join in the big game.

At our church, a big part of our culture is what we call Living Churches. They are groups that meet in the evening for a couple of hours in houses – we have 10 of these groups meeting every week and groups every weeknight. So most weeknights I am out visiting and encouraging the groups. I run two myself, my wife runs two, and when we are in we consider that time to be very precious family time. So I don't do much evening visits with people. Some people get upset – they want me to be there for them in the

evenings but they never go to a Living Church. They are not flowing with our church. They are not getting involved in something bigger than themselves. An independent attitude.

It's harder to be involved in something bigger than yourselves. It is much harder than you can imagine. At Tree of Life Dagenham we often have up to twenty people serving in the main service – children's ministry, making teas, ushering, etc. We all meet at 9am and pray for 10-15 minutes – that way we are serving like Mary out of our intimacy with the Lord, not like Martha. It takes effort to be there for 9am, but if you can't follow the group calendar or clock you have an independent attitude, and that leads (eventually) to disloyalty.

Does this happen in the Bible? Yes! Absolutely, Joab was David's right hand man. To use modern terms, he was the assistant pastor. But it is clear throughout Scripture he was there doing his thing, not David's thing. David was a man of peace, but Joab was a task man – he missed David's attitude and heart and went on doing his own thing. He didn't understand David's vision, David's behaviour, David's grace – and in a fit of offense did things his own way.

Pastor Joab was nodding in the staff meeting, but went out the door and did what he wanted. He never left David's ministry – he enjoyed the benefits of being in the ministry but never submitted to the vision.

For example, in 2 Sam. 18.5, David is explicit to everyone: show grace and gentleness to Absalom. Forgive him for his rebellion. That was David's way.

In 2 Sam. 18.12-14, Joab kills Absalom to protect David. It looks loyal. It looks fanatical. But he is doing it his way, not David's way. This is an independent attitude – it is in the organization but doesn't care about how the organization does things. Worship leaders who play songs that are not on the churches' white list, assistant pastors who preach crosswise to the pastor when he is out of church, ushers who welcome people and then tell them the latest gossip, elders who run the Living Church how they want and teach what they want the way they want. It's an independent attitude – and people who have one will never manage to be part of something bigger than themselves, and therefore are never significant.

An independent attitude is only a few steps away from stabbing you in the back. In 2 Sam. 12.28 Joab tells David unless you get off your backside and do what I want then I will name this town after myself. That is one of the biggest hallmarks of an independent attitude – people with one want a name for themselves. I remember a worship leader who wanted to lead worship but leave before the sermon started. Forget that! That's an infectious attitude. I'd rather turn the CD player on.

I've seen this attitude lead to branch pastors renaming the church and making it their church, I've seen this attitude leading elders to turn house groups into their own personal church.

(Incidentally, that's why some pastors hate branch churches and small groups – they are so concerned about a Joab taking over, but let me say that the rewards are always more than the risk. Always always disciple people and release them. For every Judas stabbing you in the back you get 11 good guys. Ok, so one of them might always stick their foot in their mouth, two of them might be sons of thunder, one of them might be the poster boy for doubting but as you disciple and release they will work miracles and build the kingdom. It's worth far more than the pain of one betrayal!)

Always beware of people with independent spirits. People who don't follow your calendar and clock. Church starts at 10am and they substitute that for their own personal arrival time. Conference is **August 6th-9th**, but they go on holiday then even though they have known about it for a year. People who want to name things after themselves – they run their own small group programme rather than plugging into yours.

I'm not saying any of these things are wrong, but if you keep seeing signs of independence that is not a person who is with you. Until the signs change, don't promote that person. It will save you pain, it will save you loss, it will save your dreams.

5. Loyalty Recognizing Signs of Disloyalty (2): Passivity

Last week we looked at the warning sign of an independent attitude. The next step to disloyalty is what I call passivity. Essentially someone goes dormant in an organization. That is a clear warning sign that they are offended and heading towards betrayal. Disloyalty and offense is not the only reason someone goes passive, but it is a major reason so watch out when it happens.

What does it mean to go passive?

It means to stop building with you. A deacon will resign. A trustee will step down. An elder will shut down their Living Church. A Sunday school leader will quit. An assistant pastor will still do his paid job but will be effectively working union rules, dropping any task that they are not explicitly paid for.

Now there are many reasons why someone will go passive. A new baby, a promotion at work, marital difficulties, depression. But when it comes out of disloyalty, out of offense it will happen suddenly... as the leader you may be the last to know. It will probably not happen face to face but via email or even text. This sudden step down is a big clue something is wrong.

People who serve a church either serve as Mary's or as Martha's. Mary people serve after sitting at his feet, find their identity in Christ and enjoy serving as God flows through them. They are working with God and are grateful to you for providing them a place to release their love and God given talents. You could take all responsibility from Mary, stand them down from any position and they would be happy and still be there on Sunday. Why? Because their identity is in Christ not their role. Change the role and they will be happy because Christ is still the same.

Martha people on the other hand serve out of pressure, out of insecurity and out of fear. They, like Martha in the bible, will miss the sermon to serve, not relax when serving, and always judge others for not serving like them. These people find their identity in their service not in Christ. Take that serving from them, our should they find themselves in a position where the task is too difficult, too mundane, too lowly for them they will lash out at others. They will put others down, try and sabotage others and point out their flaws... often their job is undone whilst they are doing someone else's task because that helps their self image better. Eventually the cycle of Martha is too painful and the person throws their hands up and quits.

This is a major problem if this happens. Remember Martha's identity is in serving. Now she isn't serving anymore she needs to assure herself in her identity and to do that she pulls down everyone in leadership

and everyone serving. Passivity quickly leads to critical attitudes. Stopping building nearly always leads to starting to tear down.

What to do with someone in the passive zone?

1. Hit it head on. Ask them why they are standing down, what they are doing instead, and whether they plan on resuming duties at some point. Their answers will help you know what is going on. I don't recommend asking someone outright whether they are offended, it's a rare person who can admit it!
2. A notice period. Even volunteers should be expected to do a short notice period. Why? Because they take time to replace. But in terms of seeing whether someone is offended, whether they work a notice period is a massive key as to whether they are offended. Offended people down tools and go. People who are being led forward to another ministry by God will make sure there is a clear handover of tools.
3. Don't make it easy for them to turn critical. Ensure people know they are not in that position any more. Ensure you get your keys back. Change all the passwords. Don't let them stand there and watch where they used to serve. (Side note... This is why retired pastors should leave their church)
4. Help them see their identity is in Christ. We have to be careful as pastors and leaders when we see people who overserve. It is so lovely to have the task done we forget our overlook we are hurting a person. Ensure the person is in the service, ensure people around them are helping them see their worth. See if they will do a Freedom in Christ course.
5. Don't be hasty to give them the task again. This sort of cooling down takes time.

6. Loyalty... Signs of Disloyalty (3): Criticism



*Hi there, my name is Benjamin Conway, and I am the pastor of **Tree of Life Church** in Dagenham. We are currently looking at the topic of Loyalty – something you need to cultivate as a leader.*

As soon as someone gets to the passive stage of disloyalty (stage 2, as discussed [here](#)), you need to know that the next step is criticism. It's an easy step – someone gets to the stage where they are

annoyed and offended to the point where they stop building the house, they are now in a position to start criticizing how the house is being built. Someone quits the children's ministry – not because God is leading them to a new opportunity, but because of offense. Leave it a while because they will next start to subtly attack the children's ministry:

“They don't care for the kids anymore...”

“It's too worldly...”

“It's too religious”

“If I was still there, I would...”

They have now stopped building the wall and started ripping down the wall. They have stopped living for the vision and started finding fault with the vision. You can only move into the critical phase if you have first stopped working. People on the team don't rip the team apart – only the people who have left the team spectate and criticize the team!

When someone is critical you need to watch out – you have an explosion coming. Now – you might not know that person is critical because they may take their criticisms elsewhere. But you need to know that a critical person is hard to help. At this stage, someone will ask “what about a legitimate criticism?”, That's a great question, and there are three simple ways to tell the difference between a legitimate criticism and a critical attitude that will lead to disloyalty.

1. A genuine criticism can be resolved. Let's say you were round someone's house and broke a lamp or something. They may have genuine reason to criticize you. But if you buy them a new lamp of equivalent value and style, then it has been resolved. A critical attitude cannot be resolved. The person is offended and nothing will make them happy. You can try a few times but it won't work.

2. A genuine criticism is reasonable. Other people can see it – if you are wise, you can hear the truth in it yourself. A critical attitude is unreasonable. A genuine criticism is that the sound quality at the back of the hall was not good today. A critical attitude wants you to resign, the board to resign and all the elders to resign as they don't have the right revelations.

3. A genuine criticism is constructive. The person giving the criticism wants to help, wants to move things forward – they are looking for unity, restoration, progress and building. A critical attitude is destructive – it wants to rip things apart, it wants to hurt, it wants the win. Often people who are insecure end up in this stage quickly – the only way they can feel good about themselves is ensuring everyone else feels bad about themselves so they lay into people.

Dealing with this phase is difficult. People are warm – they are getting hot and are ready to explode quickly and they move onto the political phase quickly. We will discuss that next week, but let's conclude this week with three steps to handle critical people in your church, business or camp:

1. Don't give them responsibility. They have probably taken themselves out of any position that involves work in the passive stage, but now they will look for a position that involves responsibility over other performance but no actual work. Don't do it. Don't be pressured by it. If someone explodes because you didn't make them an elder, rejoice – they would have exploded AS an elder at some point and it's good that didn't happen.

2. Don't let criticism from those with attitude get to you. Don't even respond to it. You are not criticism led, you are Spirit led. That's a fact. You should not even respond. I don't respond to emails that just tear down, I don't respond to people who rip me apart and attack our church. I don't respond – not even one bit. I don't move, I don't change what I am doing, I don't fret about it, I don't lose sleep over it. Their behaviour is their responsibility. Their attitude is their responsibility. I am responsible before God to do what I am called to do.

(As an aside, Facebook is the best way to criticize me if you want to – it has a block button and everything. It's awesome!)

3. Don't fight fire with fire. When someone comes at you with criticism, the temptation is point out that they are not all that. It is a real temptation to tear them to pieces. Don't do it. Bless those who curse you.

7. Loyalty: Signs of Disloyalty (4): POLITICS!



The next stage of disloyalty after turning critical is turning political. Political people damage a church and need to be handled carefully and firmly. You know when you are boiling a kettle, before it boils over you see and hear the steam escaping. That is the political stage – it doesn't boil over yet, but it will start to be noticeable. Remember the Bible is clear: a bitter root is infectious (Hebrews 12.15).

It amazes me when someone comes to me and says “Do you know Brother X? He is getting a little disheartened at church.” I wonder why Brother X told that person, I wonder why that person didn't

challenge them, and I wonder why that person is telling me. The answer is that people just before they betray a church get involved in church politics. A church without politics is a church moving forward. If you remember the previous stages ([independence](#), [passivity](#) and [criticism](#)) of disloyalty and offense, you will remember that before the political stage, the person has stopped helping the church and is now looking for reasons to pick the church apart. Because misery loves company, they are looking for ways to now influence other passive and independent and critical people and build a power base in the middle of your church.

Pastor – you have spent blood, sweat and tears building the church – don't let a donkey rip it apart by playing politics. It is easy done! I found when our church was 5 people no one really wanted a power base, now we are larger people want a piece of the pie. We have had people sneak off with our elders and offer them roles in their churches, ask for secret offerings for their businesses and secret investments into their stock, people holding secret prophetic meetings because we are not prophetic enough. People will try anything to build their power base out of your ministry rather than go into all the world and make disciples! And the way they do it is through church politics.

After the service, where everyone else is packing, serving, cleaning and counting, you wander around infecting people. “The preacher went on too long today”, “too harsh”, “too soft”, “worship was a bit bland today”. The politician wants power – they want the church to accommodate them and only them. The favourite phrase of the politician is “a lot of people are saying that...”

This process could take a lot of time. Absalom spent two years in the passive state, doing nothing in the kingdom, then suddenly became a politician (see 2 Sam. 15.3) visiting people that the king could not help and told them “it's a pity the king has no time for you”, “it's a pity he is not taking care of

you.” Politicians tell people what they want to hear: “David’s getting older, finding it tough to cope, just a figurehead...”

It happens in churches: “how did you find the service? I thought it was dry today”, “as a faith church, you’d think there’d be some miracles today”, “our pastor works a little hard”. It’s infectious. They make their snide comments as a way to disparage other people from loyalty, to discourage them from serving. To build their own power base.

A politician will go around the church seeking who they can devour... seeking who they can influence. You need to teach your people how to resist politicians. You need to resist them yourself!

There are a number of ways to deal with politicians. Here are three:

1. The North Wind Face

Read Proverbs 25.23. It says that as the north wind drives away rain, an angry face can drive away criticism. You can drive away small, infectious thoughts with one angry face. You need a face that says “I am not going down that line”. People start to come out with their political lines, give them the northwind face. As a young man in a charismatic church I was sitting next to my house group leader, one of the kindest people I have ever met. At the end of the service, the pastor – who had started the church in his house and taken it up to hundreds, took a second offering. Being a Baptist boy, the idea of a second offering offended me and I started to get offended and disloyal. I turned to my house group leader and said to her “what’s he taking a second offering for”. My tone was critical, my question was disloyal. Well, this lady looked at me and glared. Her face said about 4 pages – and the largest type in the four pages was “who are you to ask such a question?”... her northwind face drove away all my critical attitude. You need a face like that!

2. Fire Test

In Acts 28.3, a viper jumped out the fire and bit Paul. How did the viper get in the fire? The fire was made of sticks, and the viper in the cold would have been sleeping and looked similar to a stick. It wasn’t until the fire started that its true nature was revealed. Vipers look harmless until the fire starts!

Time is a good fire – test people with time. Let’s you know who the snakes are. Difficult circumstances is a good fire. Change is a good fire – change some procedures and that will show you who is a snake in disguise as a stick.

Be wary of promoting or devoting to people who have never been in a fire – you don’t really know them.

3. Teaching Like This!

We need to explain to people that as they warm up that they are in danger of boiling over and let them know how to deal with this. Let them know at the danger of offense is that it stops you dreaming big because it floods your thoughts with small thoughts.

Some people don't like me teaching on loyalty. Some pastors say not to do it, then they get stabbed in the back. Let's not sweep stuff under the carpet, let's deal with this and create a place where people are free from politics and free from disloyal, offended, critical, passive, independent church politicians.

8. Loyalty: Signs of Disloyalty (5) – the Backstab



This is the final posting on signs of disloyalty, but there will be a couple more posts on the concepts and the importance of loyalty coming up! My name is Benjamin Conway, and I pastor the Tree of Life Church, and you are going to have a great time reading this blog!

So far we have looked at the signs of disloyalty, and found out that it starts small – with independence, then with some passivity, then criticisms, then it starts to leak out as the person becomes a church politician and tries to build a power base based entirely on criticism and negativity. This is not pie in the sky – these things happen in businesses, in families, in churches all the time. We need to be prepared and we need to be aware. The Holy Spirit is a gentle dove, not an ostrich that puts its head in the sand and pretends problems are not there. The reason we have to spot the signs of disloyalty – the subtle independence as someone doesn't do your study, but their study; the passive person who suddenly drops off all the rotas, the person who “is only trying to help” but is just ripping down everything the people who are working are doing, and then the person mingling around the church during the teas on a Sunday letting everyone know they are not as happy as they used to be – is because disloyalty ends up with a backstab.

Just like a kettle that is getting warmer and starting to steam will eventually boil over, disloyalty that starts with passivity if not checked will end up with a backstab.

This is the final stage of disloyalty – you will be betrayed. When the person gets enough of a power base they think they can do something about it, they will start to attack you openly. There are three different ways this attack will come:

1. An attack on your capability
2. An attack on your character
3. An attack on your credibility

The first one is about your ability to lead and run the church. People will point out the mistakes you have made (if you are part of a successful, growing ministry you will have made mistakes, you will have taken risks some of which won't have worked, you will have made mistakes. That's what people doing things do. Passive people never made mistakes because they are risking nothing, doing nothing, reaching no-one,

helping nobody, and doing no good for the kingdom), will harp on about money they feel was squandered because an outreach programme didn't work, will claim that you no longer are capable of making good decisions. This is how Absalom dealt with David – every time David acted as a mediator,

The second attack that offended, religious people make is against your character. They will tell you that you don't pray enough, don't read the Bible enough, that you don't give enough, that you are unloving, that you are too mean, too harsh, too soft. What generally happens is people find things about your **personality** and attack them as if they were a character flaw. Character is about integrity, personality is about who we are. It's awesome that God creates everyone different – some people like comedies, others action films, other romance. What happens is that when people want to assassinate the character of someone who has good character they attack their personality. Some people are loud, others are quiet. So if you are loud, they tear you apart for being abrupt, for being a party animal, too shallow, for being this and that. If you are quiet, you are attacked for being timid, and too quiet, and not charismatic enough. If you like a certain sport or TV programme you are called worldly, if you don't watch sports or TV you are called a Pharisee in an ivory tower.

The third attack is your credibility. People will just blatantly say you can't do it – you can't run the team, lead the church, get the ministry out of debt. They won't even offer evidence – they are not thinking logically they are boiling over with rage and they don't want to have a discussion they want to have an argument. They won't accept any explanation for their behaviour and their opinions.

When people start making blatant attacks against your character and your personality – then everyone around has to make a choice to stay loyal or not. This is when a church splits. People follow the backstabber, others stay. Others get so confused they drop out of church completely.

If you haven't spotted the signs before this point, and you are being backstabbed then you need to take urgent and rapid action to protect your heart and your future. This is why we try and notice disloyalty and deal with it earlier!

But if it is at this late stage there are a number of steps you should take today:

1. Remove the backstabber from all positions of leadership immediately. You are not about to let this person keep having influence you give them. In Scripture, pastors appoint elders not the other way around!
2. Don't get upset at people leaving – some of them were never with you in the first place. Better you know that now. Focus on those who stay. Show them love, preach life and grace to them, help them walk in victory. Keep going for their sake.
3. Deal with bitterness. Get rid of it. Forgive the backstabber. Love them to pieces.

4. Don't let them back into your inner sanctum of friends again. Not after a significant amount of time and proving. They can be welcome in the church if you feel comfortable, but keep a fence between you and them. Don't give them the bullets to shoot you with.

If you need any help dealing with backstabbers – or you have experience or wisdom you want to share please comment below!

Grace and peace,

Benjamin