

Q&A – Staying Strong

"How do you maintain a healthy family and relationship with God amidst your schedule and responsibilities?"

Well, keep in mind I took over a decent sized church as a 24 year old. I was technically in charge of the church staff, a K-12 private Christian school, a 2 year Ministry Training School, several conferences and an outreach that was attended by over 14,000 people. So, making that transition was about as traumatic as you could possibly imagine. But, once I made it, it became increasingly easier. As my mentor and Father in the Lord, Glenn Smith, always told me: "*You don't blow into ministry, you grow into ministry.*" So, although the sudden growth at Substance seems a bit crazy for a person my age (and it is), it still isn't a disturbing transition for me. These changes are everything I was ready for (at least, some of them were :) Also, I've made numerous commitments to my family and my staff:

(1). I'm never going to start ministries that I don't have leaders for: Every few weeks, someone comes to me pointing out a "gaping hole" in our programming here at Substance. I promised God that I'm not going to try to be everyone's savior. And if we have to be patient with inferior programming then so be it. This leads to the next commitment.

(2). I'm never going to build Substance by politically indulging everyone. People are picky about what they want in a church. Everyone has a different "favorite ministry". Also, everyone wants to counsel with the senior pastor. So, in having boundaries for many of these things, I occasionally make people mad. (For e.g, I don't officiate weddings anymore or do counseling). But, for the most part, people are gracious about the responsibilities I have on my plate. And especially as I've been juggling book writing and a masters degree, I really don't have time to be everyone's savior. But thankfully, I don't have to be. That job is already taken.

(3). I'm not going to be a "pastor" to the detriment of being a spouse or a parent. Good leadership comes out of the overflow of (1), my relationship with God; (2). my relationship with my spouse; (3). my relationship with my kids; (4) my relationships with my staff; (5) my relationships with my accountability group; and lastly, my relationships with my inner circle of friends, extended family, and lay-leaders.

I've realized that I cannot be everyone's pastor. But, I have the ability to raise up an army of pastors, lay leaders, and counselors who are absolutely dynamic. Ultimately, people are constantly tempting me to circumvent the above hierarchy; but, I know that I'm not running a 100-meter dash in the ministry. Rather, I'm running a marathon.

So, what do I do? I go on a lot of date nights with my wife. We probably go out to dinner more than most people do; but, come on! She's my lucky lady! I've got to treat her well. Some call it the 7-7-7 principle... Every seven days, a date... every seven weeks, a romantic getaway... and every seven months an extended vacation apart from kids.

Our family also practices scheduled family nights at least two nights a week. We also go on a minimum of 2 week long family vacations a year. So, we probably spend a little more money escaping than most families. But, I'd rather have "older cars" and a good vacation than a family that doesn't love each other.

As to my relationship with God, I do four things: First of all, I try to read at least 10 minutes of God's word each day. Whenever I'm tempted to skip it, I simply put on a timer for 10 minutes and force myself to read it.

Secondly, I also listen to a lot of sermon podcasts while I work out... particularly Andy Stanley, Craig Groeschel, Chris Hodges, & Greg Surrat (with an occasional Francis Chan or James McDonald).

Also, my accountability group picks up a good amount of slack. Every Tuesday, we get together for prayer and / or confession. They pretty much know every sick or vile thought that came into my head that week. (We're all brutally honest). After all, if I can't be authentic with Christians I trust, then, the likelihood of me being authentic with God is slim and none.

Lastly, my staff and my mentors help me a great deal. I'm constantly talking with my staff; and, they're always graciously pulling random responsibilities off of my shoulders. And I've got numerous mentors who pastor churches that are a few steps ahead of Substance. They always give me the insights I need right when I need them. So rather than working harder, they always help me work smarter. And I thank God for my staff and my mentors every day.

But that's where YOU come in. Yes. I said, you. I need your daily prayers. With all of the crazy opportunities God is throwing our way, I realize that I need to broaden out our prayer support. So, join me in all of this. Amen?

After all, I cannot afford to be a full-time pastor and a part-time follower of Christ. And if you want to listen to me every Sunday, then I'm sure you agree.