

Dispensing Advice to the Clueless

How do you Redirect Sincere Blindness?

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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As a “professional” minister who lives each day involved in the lives of others, calling, nurturing, admonishing and encouraging them toward the Christ life, you’ve probably counseled some who were considering directing their lives in the path you’ve chosen.

As a minister you’re complimented. Perhaps something you’ve said or done triggered their inclination and you’re justifiably pleased to hear them say so.

Or perhaps instead, you know this person well enough to realize that a destination of “professional minister” would be the absolute wrong address for them to set in their spiritual GPS. You love them, you’re complimented but your gut reaction is to shield your eyes from the looming wreck.

What do you do?

Recently a bright middle aged friend had a “revelation” over a new interest she developed in health. Tired of a job that was boring, repetitive, non-ministry and with which she was totally fed up, she discerned that God was showing her a new avenue in which to invest her life, that of personal health coach.

She invested significant time and funds to earn a certificate in this field from an entity in New York. Now she is a jobless, certified health coach looking for clients, trusting God and kind of seeking guidance. I say “kind of” because marketing, communications, advertising and social networking advice and logic are taking a back seat to the excitement of “seeing what God is going to do next.”

This is a wonderful woman, brimming with excitement and faith. She is educated and well spoken. But she is a soft personal trainer and a pale health coach. In other words, she is not an obvious example of the benefits of her diet, nutrition and exercise regimen.

The best yard in my neighborhood belongs to a lawn care professional. His grass is always green, even without a septic tank; he changes his flowers seasonally and trims his shrubs. His yard is the best advertisement for his business.

My friend is not the best advertisement for her business. How do you advise well meaning people with a word from the Lord who appear to be rowing upstream in a leaky canoe using a sieve for a paddle?

Another friend with a generous heart and commitment to tithing – although not necessarily to his church – talked with me about his dilemma over supporting someone in ministry who was his mother’s best friend and a dear person in his own life when he was a child. This friend is investing herself so deeply in neighborhood children to give them a welcoming place in her home and opportunities for life experiences they wouldn’t otherwise receive that she is in danger of losing her house for lack of making the mortgage payment.

To fund her ministry she does odd jobs and bakes specialty sweets. You can imagine that kind of work leaves her fiscally marginal. She asked my friend for a one-time gift to cover her mortgage. Which he gave.

The next month, she asked for that same commitment for the following three months, to get her through the summer.

How would you advise him?

How would you advise the young woman raised in a fundamentalist church who tells you she feels called to the pastorate? How would you advise the young man confined to a wheelchair who tells you he feels a yearning to be a youth minister? What do you tell a shy, retiring man with a family of five who is barely making ends meet that he feels led to pack up the family and move to another state to attend seminary so he can train as a pastor?

In other words, as a minister yourself, how do you best help people define that spiritual yearning in their lives that they interpret as a call to ministry when to your own eye they give no evidence of any potential for “success?”

Define success however you wish here; you know what I mean.

Do you owe them the cold slap of reality? Do you owe them encouragement to pursue what may be a God-given yearning – even though you can’t see how it could be so? Do you owe them a pin to prick their balloon before it lifts them high enough for the fall to hurt when it does finally break?

Do you owe them help to make the dream come true, or at least to make possible the next step? Do you owe them a real investment of your time to continue discussion and prayer together about their thoughts? What do you do when a person seeks your help in moving toward a ministry career when to your eye he or she is not qualified and is bound to crash hard into the wall of disappointment down the road?

Important Things to Know

Norman Jameson is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership and a member of the Funding Ministry team. He is available for to speak with leaders, congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations about capital funding and/or communications needs.

The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. ***Travel Free Learning*** is a leadership development emphasis of The Columbia Partnership. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.