



3 DESTRUCTIVE SNARES THREATENING MINISTRY LEADERS

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Recently, we've seen influential and respected church leaders fail, disqualifying themselves from vocational ministry. Failure after failure disturbs us, and we wonder how this can happen. What events or patterns or missteps led to such unfortunate ends? Of course, we can take this question too far, wanting to know and see all things as only God can. But within reason, it's a helpful question, even a protective one. Seeking an answer may help us avoid a similar outcome, while promoting faithful ministry for as many days as God would give us.

Thankfully, He gives us an answer in His Word, and I believe it's at the heart of our ministry challenges, as well as most of the public failures we've recently witnessed:

"The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." - Proverbs 29:25

Leaders can either be motivated by the fear of man or the fear of the Lord. The question is, "Which one motivates you?" At the end of the day, whose "well done" do we care about most?

Three Destructive Snares of the Fear of Man

The "snares" that the fear of man threatens to lay can be as numerous and diverse as the leaders stepping into them, but three come to mind as common snares. Are they familiar to you?



1. Snare #1: Pride

The temptation to idolize people's praise and approval—yes, even the people we serve—can lead to selfish ambition, coveting, comparison, criticism, and discontentment, all of which are focused on self. As a leader, if you crave attention, if your mood depends on what people say or think, if you're constantly comparing your work and outcomes to other people's, if you're a workaholic, or if your goal is to lord your influence over others, you'll want to watch for the destructive snare of pride.

2. Snare #2: Disobedience

The fear of man can lead us to do things we never thought we'd do. Whether power tempts us to compromise our beliefs, or we grow paralyzed by the fear of failure, the allure to obey people (even our own flesh) rather than God can be strong. If you dislike feeling out of place in the world, if you're tempted to sin because you know God will forgive you later, or if you think about covering up your sin from trusted friends and colleagues, you'll want to watch for the snare of disobedience.

3. Snare #3: Self-Sufficiency

Ministry leaders can be tempted to self-reliance. We can even sacrifice soul-care for service. Helping, caring for, and serving the church is certainly a good thing. But only Jesus is the Savior—and how often do we try to be pseudo-saviors, saying yes to everyone and everything? Similarly, only Jesus is Lord, ruling over us with His good and kind commands, but we often let others function as little lords, telling us what to think and do. If serving God (and others) has replaced love for God, if you're constantly worried about losing people's respect or affection, or if you're regularly exhausted, you'll want to watch for the snare of self-sufficiency.

The Way of Escape

The relieving news is that God offers us an escape from these destructive snares:

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." - **1 Corinthians 10:13**

What are some ways of escape that God provides for us when we're afraid of people and tempted to put them in His place?

1. Escape #1: The Way of Love

When we idolize people's praise and approval, we become ensnared in pride. But as we look to Jesus, in all His greatness and splendor and beauty, we grasp how lowly we are in comparison, and yet, how loved we are by Him. Our blood-bought acceptance into God's family reminds us that nothing can separate us from His love—even disapproval or criticism. The vast and unchanging love of God, as proven in His Son, frees and empowers us to love and serve people for His glory, rather than use them for our own.

2. Escape #2: The Way of Obedience

When we cave to peer pressure or fleshly desires, we become ensnared in disobedience. But when we obey God rather than men ([Acts 5:29](#)), we walk in a way that pleases and honors Him. The Word of Christ has the final say over us, and we will be held to this standard when we appear before His throne: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" ([2 Cor. 5:10](#)). Our good works testify to the genuineness of our faith ([James 2:17](#)), and that Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who sees and knows all things compels us to fear and follow Him: "we make it our aim to please him" ([2 Cor. 5:9](#)).



3. Escape #3: The Way of Dependence

When we people-please ourselves into exhaustion, we become ensnared in self-sufficiency. We do, do, do for Jesus rather than rest in His work, which is done. We need to remember that our God-given limitations exist for a purpose: to teach us dependence on Him and to encourage the people we're leading in the same pursuit. We want them to see Christ in us, the hope of glory, and that His grace is enough to sustain us. So we consider it our joy to serve with the strength He supplies, even if it means appearing inadequate to some people. We gladly boast in weakness so that we may boast in Christ ([2 Cor. 12:9](#)).

"The fear of man lays a snare," Scripture cautions us, "but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe" ([Prov. 29:25](#)). We leaders can believe and carry this promise with us, both as a sober warning against the destruction of fearing people and also as a strong encouragement to fear the only One whose "well done" truly, eternally matters.

Portions of this article were taken from the book [Fight Your Fears: Trusting the Character and Promises of God When You Are Afraid](#).