

Too many pastors suffer from loneliness in ministry. After a while, that loneliness exacts a heavy toll. But what's the cure? It lies in fostering three types of connections. Here's some practical advice on finding relationships that will help make you, and your ministry, healthy.



BY BILL GROSS, NATIONAL CHURCH OFFICE MISSIONAL COACH/CONSULTANT

I recently read a blog post on how pastors should combat loneliness in the ministry. Tip No. 1 was, “Make a list of specific things God has done for you lately.” Tip No. 2 instructed, “Spend more time in prayer.” Tip No. 3 stated, “Meditate upon the scriptural fact that you are not alone.”

Deep sigh. Why would we ever think that God’s best plan for loneliness would not include spending some quality time with other humans? I believe feeling lonely is more often a symptom of our need for human interaction than a lack of divine relationship.

My prescription for loneliness is to build three types of intentional relationships that will help you navigate life and ministry. Every leader needs friends, mentors and rabbis. Working together, these relationships function as a personal “triple-braided cord” (see Eccl. 4:12, NLT) to strengthen your heart, soul and mind.

● Making Friends

I once read about a “friend broker” who helped highly successful, high-intensity business people find friends. Their lives were too busy and too complicated to find friends on their own—sad, but true. I think

pastors can be too busy, as well, never venturing out of their church offices to make friends.

Join a gym or get a hobby. Join a bike club or a book club or hang out with some neighbors. Better yet, invite a couple guys from church to hang out and just “be guys,” or women from the church with whom you can be yourself. But here’s the key: You have to treat them as peers and share your life with them.

● Finding Mentors

Mentors are wise souls who have successfully walked the roads you are traveling. They are guides who are willing to help you find your way. Really good mentors help you see Christ in your decisions and show you how to walk out the amazing directions the Holy Spirit whispers in your ear at every turn. Mentors are good for your soul.

No one mentor can do it all, so that’s why you need a few. Once you find someone who fits the bill, ask him or her for some advice—a trial mentoring moment. Most successful people want to mentor others.

● Seeking Rabbis

Rabbis make truth come to life, so that precepts become personal convictions. They bring context to what God has declared by teaching you how to hear Him speak to your

intellect and imagination. Great rabbis inspire you to love the Word of God and to become a lifelong seeker of all that is true and holy. Rabbis are good for your mind.

Good rabbis might be the easiest of the three relationships to find. Some will be up close and personal, while others might be far away and not personally acquainted with you. Find some great authors and read their books. Look for great teachers, and listen to their podcasts or watch their YouTube clips. Maybe you can even find an excellent pastor or professor nearby with whom you can sit and talk.

There you have it. If you are lonely, you should certainly connect with the creator of all things. But you should also cultivate relationships with some friends, mentors and rabbis. You will have to open your heart a bit wider to allow others in, and you will need to give them permission to mess with your neatly ordered beliefs and convictions—but, trust me, you’ll be better for it.



Start making connections!

Get all of Bill Gross’ helpful tips on building relationships at 4sq.ca/relationships.