



Are You Relational or Informational?

Many pastors are much better at imparting information than they are at building relationships.

They are comfortable in their studies. They love their books. They pride themselves on their sound doctrine. They come alive in the pulpit as they proclaim “the wisdom of God” through carefully-crafted sermons.

But when it comes to engaging their people on a personal level, they are often seen as being aloof, insensitive, or unable to relate to the struggles of real life.

What these pastors often fail to realize is that God’s wisdom is primarily **relational**, not **informational**.

The vast majority of the Bible’s teachings on wisdom are presented in the context of how people relate to God and to one another. Take James 3:17 for example:

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

As this passage shows, biblical wisdom is not a set of facts, principles, or assertions that we are to ponder in the abstract. Rather, it is a set of character and behavioral qualities that God calls us to live out in our daily relationships as we embrace the gospel and draw on his grace.

Even if a pastor tries to move from the abstract to the practical, it’s not good enough simply to **teach** people how to apply these principles relationally. To be truly effective in his preaching and pastoral ministry, he must also **model** these qualities in his own life, giving his people an example to follow, just as Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Peter did (see John 13:15; 1Cor. 11:1; 1Tim. 4:12; 1Pet. 5:3).

Moving from the informational to the relational can produce major ministry dividends, as is illustrated in a letter I was copied on three days ago. It’s from a pastor who was urging a seminary to sponsor a seminar on relational wisdom:

A woman called me this morning. She was in tears because a close friend said some unkind things to her moments before. We spoke for twenty minutes, prayed, and arranged for follow-up later. Sounds like a typical day in the life of a pastor, right?

It wasn't a typical day in the life of this pastor until recently—thanks to relational wisdom training.

Over the last six months I've built a healthy relationship with this woman through a friendly face, empathy, and encouragement. She is not a member of our church but I have evidently become her pastor.

What changed? My ministry to her a few months ago would have ended with a teaching on peacemaking, but today I offered her more than the 4 G's (as good as they are). I offered her understanding, compassion, and affirmation. I acknowledged that her experience was painful. I gently opened her eyes to pain in the other woman's life that may have triggered her unkind words (a recent diagnosis, a brother terminally ill).

Lord willing, we will soon get to peacemaking and reconciliation with her friend (who is also a member of our church). But I wouldn't even have had the phone call that opened the door for Gospel healing without the healthy relationship I've nurtured over the last six months.

Not only that, but when we get to peacemaking, both parties will listen to me because I have been listening to them. By God's grace, I have worked to establish an authentic, caring relationship with each of them. That's really what relational wisdom is all about: practical, biblical wisdom for building genuine relationships.

That's why I'm so thankful for RW360, which provides a biblical foundation, practical skills, and a simple paradigm to equip God's people (including pastors) to not only heal broken relationships through peacemaking but also to establish healthy relationships in the first place.

As this letter shows, it's never too late to learn how to become more relational, whether you're a pastor, a parent, a spouse, or an employer. And when you do, all of life becomes an opportunity to imitate and introduce others to Jesus, the most relational person who's ever walked the face of the earth (Eph. 5:1-2).

- Ken Sande

Reflection Questions

- What about you? Do you find it easier to be informational than it is to be relational as a pastor, parent, spouse, or employer? Why?
- Which of the wisdom qualities described in James 3:17 would you most like to develop in the coming year? Write it down, ask God to help you to grow, and ask a friend to work with you in developing that quality.
- Do you have a pastor, parent, spouse, or employer who is relational? Encourage him or her by sending a copy of this post and writing, "Thank you for modeling the relational qualities God calls me to develop."
- Are there people in your life who are more informational than relational? Don't indulge a critical attitude toward them. Instead, pray for them. Look for opportunities to encourage them when they are relational. Pray for an opportunity to suggest that they support a Discovering Relational Wisdom seminar so that your entire church or organization can grow in this area.

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