

Seduced by Power

PASTOR'S ROLE

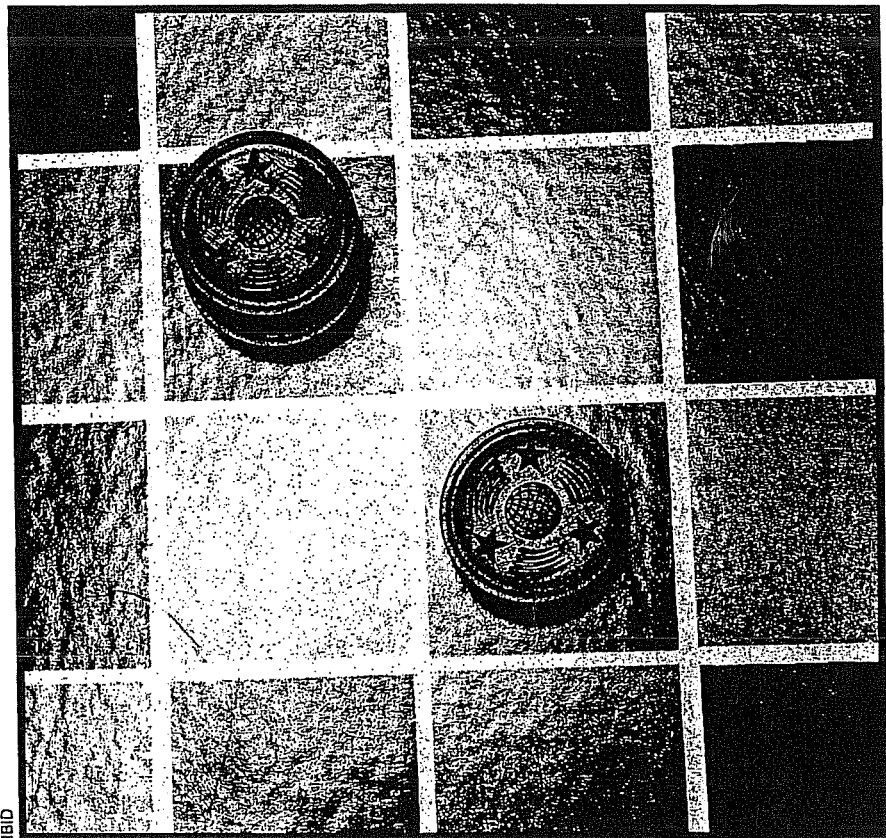
Forget money and sex.
The real temptation is "king me."

GARY SINCLAIR

A neighboring pastor's ministry imploded. It was a slow, inward collapse over a five-year period, with the blast at the end rather than the beginning. Jim was a gifted communicator, a man of vision brimming with potential. But he was slowly seduced by his power. His giftedness to lead was overtaken by a drive to control. There were warning signs that could have alerted him to his peril, but neither Jim nor his church recognized them.

Jim came to Englewood Community Church* with an impressive resume. He trained under one of the world's premier pastors. The church that had plateaued began to grow again under Jim's leadership. They revamped some structures, added a contemporary worship service, and expanded the annual holiday music programs for which the church was known.

The energetic pastor's tell-it-like-it-is preaching style was appreciated by the church's stalwarts and newcomers alike. Jim headed and completed a building campaign in his first three years. When Jim ran a meeting (which was most of the time), it was thoroughly planned and each person understood his task before leaving for home. Englewood church, once aging and a little clunky,



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now operated like a well-oiled machine.

But few people realized what was happening behind that façade. Englewood's pastor was being seduced.

Warning signs

Englewood was a trusting church. Most members could remember only two pastors. Both had long tenures. One died in office and the other left

for a prominent ministry opportunity at a time when most pastors would have retired. The church respected the office of pastor and generally gave those who held it freedom to innovate. That, combined with their joy at Jim's early successes, might account for their failure to see the changes in Jim and his relationship to the leaders.

Shrinking accountability. It started with the youth minister inci-

*The names have been changed.

dent. The church's board of deacons, according to the constitution, are the church's spiritual authority, and the pastor is ultimately responsible to them. On those rare occasions when the board told Jim he should do a particular thing, he had—until the complaints arose from the youth department. Several members reported a discipline problem to the deacons. Youth pastor Scott wasn't handling it to their liking, and some dissension was spreading. The deacons wanted to meet with Scott, but Jim didn't want his protégé brought before the board. "I'll take care of it," he told them.

He never did. And no one on the board said anything more about it.

After that, Jim began to ignore other board suggestions and sometimes vetoed their actions. But, because everything was running smoothly, no one seemed to mind—not at first.

Erosion of trust in others. Another shift took place with the hiring of the new associate pastor.

Jim was getting busier. From his perspective, Jim was simply keeping the ministry growing, but he agreed when the deacons said he needed some help. Perhaps they intended to retrieve some of their former responsibilities, but the plan evolved into hiring an associate pastor.

Jim offered to conduct the search himself. "After all, I know the kind of person we need," Jim told the board. He soon hired a full-time ministerial staff member without the involvement of the personnel committee or a vote of the board.

Jim's presence in church programs became more noticeable. He struc-

tured the education program, then announced the changes to the leadership team. There was no doubt that he was a gifted leader, but his attitude began to reflect a deadly presupposition: "If I want it done right, I have to do it myself."

It wasn't that Jim didn't trust others. He simply trusted himself more. He desired to build his people into capable leaders, but he felt intensely the weight of others' mistakes. Jim thought he was being prudent by en-

**I must constantly
ask God to help
me monitor my
pride.**

sure things didn't fall apart. But most of his leaders began to think, *You don't trust me.*

Redefining loyalty. Soon the emphasis was on the church projecting a polished image, a smooth-running operation led by a content, unified leadership team.

This spirit caught on, and not many people were willing to fuss over something that might upset the morale. Most leaders determined their concerns were probably minor and said nothing. Those who spoke up found their objections unwelcome.

A few began to leave the church. Jim suggested that their exit was probably for their good and the good of the church, but as is often the case, their departures were more indicative of the disease than the cure.

Loyalty and dissention were redefined. Loyalty came to mean agreement, not with Scripture or with the mission of the church, but with the pastor. Eventually Jim was surrounded by those who would tell him only what he wanted to hear. Those who did question Jim's leadership de-

isions were met with chastisement for "complaining" and being "unsubmissive."

Guarded by loyal followers, the pastor is insulated from fair criticisms of his ministry. And he is not likely to see its oncoming collapse.

Withdrawing from people. This may be the most obvious warning sign; but since it usually develops later in the cycle, it's often noticed too late to make a difference. For Jim it came near the end.

Jim became busier and more isolated. With such important decisions to make and so few people he trusted, Jim worked alone. His leadership team did not bother him. The staff remained at a distance, turning to each other for prayer and support. While the associate staff and the deacons each maintained a sense of teamwork among themselves, their camaraderie had little effect on the church or on Jim. He had few meaningful relationships, and small accountability groups didn't fit into his packed schedule.

His contact with fellow ministers dropped off. While exciting things were happening at Englewood, he readily told us, his peers, about them. Later, Jim became increasingly critical of the church and the leaders, an obvious warning sign that I see much better now. After the implosion, I wished someone could have talked to Jim. Perhaps we could have averted his resignation.

Jim left the church after his key relationships turned sour. He's in business now. I fear it's becoming another fix for his power habit.

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