Ten Percent of the People

by

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 “No matter what you do, ten percent of the people probably aren’t going to like you very much.” That comment was made by Dr. Paul Meier (of the Meier Clinic in Richardson, Texas) in an edition of “Pastor to Pastor” from Focus on the Family a few years ago. He went on to say that some of the people in the congregation just don’t relate well to pastors, or you may remind them of someone they don’t appreciate, or your personality may not connect well with their personality, or maybe they are having a problem with someone (like a boss, for example) and they can’t express their negative feelings to that person, so they take it out on you. That last one is sometimes called “triangulation.”

His point was simply this: Don’t worry about it. There’s not much you can do about it. It happens. It’s not really about you. Don’t take it personally. Don’t waste lots of effort trying to get those people to like you. It won’t work. It may make them like you even less. And while you’re spending disproportionate time and energy on those folks, you’ll be missing out on doing other things that probably would be much more productive in the service of the Lord.

Sometimes those kinds of relationships can change for the better, as you prove over time that you are faithful and trustworthy, or as the other person’s life situation changes, or when they hit a crisis and need to call on you for help, or when they take a good look at themselves and decide they have been wrong about you. But don’t hold your breath waiting for that change to happen. Just keep doing the Father’s business.

As I reflect on my 38 years in full-time parish ministry, I would add that there are probably ten percent of the people you serve who are going to like you a lot, no matter what you do (short of your having a complete meltdown). They just like pastors, or you remind them of someone they appreciate, or your personality connects well with their personality, or their relationships are in good shape in general, so they don’t have lots of anger or anxiety to project onto you.

My point is this: Don’t get a big head. It’s not really about you. Don’t take it personally. Don’t spend disproportionate amounts of time and energy with those people with whom you feel so comfortable and well-liked. If you do, you’ll be missing out on doing other things that probably would be much more productive in the service of the Lord.

I can’t say it any better or clearer than the inspired apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction . . . Keep your head in all situations . . . Discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:2, 5)