



COPING WITH MINISTRY DISCOURAGEMENT

Source: Erin Davis

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I find myself steering toward the emotional ditch of discouragement often. Some may gravitate more naturally toward anger or anxiety, but discouragement is what seems to constantly tug at me. (Though I feel those other emotions plenty.)

Perhaps that is why I so often find myself discouraged in ministry. Things rarely seem to be going the way I want them to go. I am almost never the kind of leader I want to be. The “fruit” of this ministry looks chronically underdeveloped to me.

Left unchecked, discouragement works like an infectious disease. It will make us sicker and sicker, and it will spread beyond us into the hearts of the women we love and serve. Because I know this to be true, I also know I can’t let my discouragement run unchecked. And because I want to see you thriving in your role as a women’s ministry leader, I don’t want you to remain discouraged either.

So what can we do when ministry is discouraging? Here are a few ideas.

Don't Normalize Discouragement!

Is ministry supposed to be a sacrifice? Yes.

Is it supposed to be challenging? Yes, again.

Is it supposed to feel like constantly slamming our heads against a brick wall? I think not.

Listen to Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 4:1 - *"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."*

The fact that we are in ministry at all is a gift (more on that in a moment). As we serve Christ and His Bride, we can choose Paul's posture: We do not lose heart.



Eyes on the Privilege

Paul reminded us that the ministry we have—whether it's leading large groups of women in an "official" role through the church or leading a small group of women less officially in Bible study in your home—is a showcase of mercy.

I don't deserve to have the privilege of partnering with God in building His kingdom. I am a sinner who still needs grace by the dump-truck load. There is no degree I could earn or award I could hang on my wall that would make me worthy of the high and holy calling to share the gospel and teach the Word of God.

God has used a specific quote by Helen Roseveare to pull my heart out of the ditch of discouragement over and over again. Helen was a missionary to the Congo. I have no doubt she knew how difficult ministry could be but also knew how sacred it is.

She said, "Looking back, one has tried to 'count the cost,' but I find it all swallowed up in privilege. The cost suddenly seems very small and transient in the greatness and permanence of privilege."

Go ahead. Try to stack your disappointing event registration numbers, your limited Bible study engagement, your hard conversation with that one woman who is critical of you up against the permanence of the privilege of serving Christ. It's no contest. When I start to "count the cost," discouragement often follows. When, instead, I ask the Lord to help me focus on what will last forever, the voice of discouragement almost always gets quieter.

It's Not About You (Thank Goodness!)

With one breath Paul declared that he would not lose heart in ministry. In the next he helps us see how:

"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." - 2 Corinthians 4:5

I find that discouragement hits the hardest when I take things too personally. People don't like my ideas. Women don't respond to my teaching. Attendance is low at an event I worked really hard on.

Yuck!

It's not my job to proclaim my own greatness. I proclaim Christ! If I am faithfully declaring that Jesus is Lord and His Word is true, I'm doing my job. All other metrics for measuring success are worthless.

This ministry is not about me. Your ministry is not about you. Just as a fever is an indicator that something else is wrong in our bodies, chronic discouragement may be an indicator that our ministry efforts are too focused on us.

Feelings Aren't Facts

Proverbs 28:26 gives us this gut punch: *"Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered."*

One of my ministry mentors is fond of reminding me that feelings aren't facts. Emotions aren't "bad," but they also aren't a safe litmus test for how things are really going.



Don't trust yourself to be an accurate judge of how well you are doing in ministry. Instead, walk in wisdom. Stay closely tethered to God's Word. We simply cannot minister without it. The path of ministry comes with all kinds of peaks and valleys. In contrast, God's Word promises to give us level paths. What's true in medicine is true in ministry: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Fight discouragement preemptively by reading your Bible constantly.

Rooting for You,
Erin