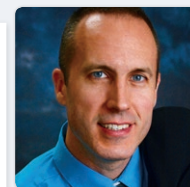


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# “Lord, I don’t want to be a pastor anymore!”

What happens when you experience discouragement and disillusionment in ministry? How do you move forward when the negative seems to outweigh the positive? What should you do when you have lost your passion for ministry and reach the point of saying, “Lord, I don’t want to be a pastor anymore”? Most pastors will go through something like this—almost inevitably.

## Discouragement in ministry

I had been a pastor in the XYZ Conference for years. We were at the annual camp meeting. The conference had arranged for all the pastors to take a comprehensive health test, sponsored by the Health Ministries Department, complete with labs and a seven- or eight-page survey. This survey had various sections related to lifestyle, eating habits, exercise, spiritual health, and even mental/emotional health.

As I filled out the survey, I answered the questions as honestly as I could. A couple of days later the health ministries director pulled me aside and said, “David, I want to talk to you about the results of your test. Physically, you are fine. But I’m concerned about the results of the mental/emotional part of your survey. It says you are heading towards depression.” Now, I was not

clinically depressed, but I was going through a difficult time in ministry.

A few days later, the conference president called me on the phone to encourage me. So I shared with him the things that were going on in my district. He knew one of the churches had a reputation for being a challenge, and I felt as if I were at the lowest point in my ministry.

## The circumstances

First, I had a head elder with whom I did not connect very well, and this made my life miserable. I am not sure why he did not like me. He was always criticizing me publicly and privately and sometimes would even do so right before the service. There was a room behind the platform where people would gather before the service. Sometimes it was just him and me in the back room, and there was no one else to protect me from his attacks. At other times it would be indirect jabs where I had to read in between the lines. He did not come right out and say it, but I knew what he meant, and so did everybody else.

Once I was standing at the door at the end of the service, greeting people as they left the sanctuary. He came up to me and said, “All you do is preach Sunday sermons.” I should have ignored it. But, being young and naïve, I asked him what he meant. He said, “All you do is preach about Jesus. I can

hear that in any Sunday church.” *I was being criticized for talking about Jesus?* Apparently a sermon series on the life of Christ was not welcome.

What really floored me is that he did not think I should be conducting evangelistic meetings. “That’s what the conference evangelist is for,” he said. According to him, I was not supposed to conduct evangelistic meetings or preach sermons about Jesus. These were two of the main reasons I became a minister in the first place. So, what was I supposed to do? I was confused and frustrated.

Another time a member of the elder’s family was extremely ill. So my wife and I would minister to and pray with them, but I knew that they did not really like us nor want us there, so it was uncomfortable. Unfortunately, the family member died. They chose to have another minister conduct the funeral, a previous pastor of their church. That was fine. I understood that we cannot connect with everyone, and people will always have their “favorite” preacher.

It was what happened after that which hurt. They had a dinner for the family and those attending the funeral. This elder and another person were standing at the buffet table. When I came up behind them, the conversation quickly stopped. The elder looked at the other person, then looked at me and said, “Oh, there’s no comparison.” I knew what he meant. They were

talking about this other minister and comparing me to him, and obviously, in his eyes, I fell far short. Even though I was used to it by now, it still hurt.

### Enough is enough

After one board meeting that went horribly wrong, I was thinking to myself, “This isn’t what ministry is supposed to be like.” I was shocked at the things people would say to a pastor. I had buried it all deep down inside. As the frustra-

yelled. Sometimes I argued with Him. Other times I sat in silence listening for His voice. I begged God to change the church and all the difficult people in it. But, I finally came to a point where I looked at my own heart and asked God to change me. A counselor once told me that “you can deal only with your side of the fence. Changing others is not in your control.” God heard that prayer.

There is a powerful promise in Micah 7:7 that says, “Therefore I will look to

sermons, visit people, or even baptize people. God loves me because I am me, He created me, He knit me together in my mother’s womb, He died for me, and I am His child. I cannot make God love me more than He already does.

Why do I stress this? Because when people say negative things about us, sometimes we tend to believe it. When we are going through a time of discouragement, we are vulnerable. More than ever, I needed to remember that God

*God does not love me  
because I give Bible  
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tions of ministry crashed down upon me, I just fell to the floor crying, “Lord, I don’t want to be a pastor anymore!”

All that led me to the point where I had lost my sense of calling. I had come to a crossroad where I could not ignore my feelings any longer, and I knew I had to deal with it.

So I poured out my heart to God. For me, this meant setting aside my schedule and taking long portions of the day to spend time with Him—taking a few days to separate myself from the busyness of life. I took long walks in nature, where I could be alone with God. Sometimes I cried. Sometimes I

the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me” (KJV).

### Six lessons

From that experience, there were six important things I learned:

1. *I am worth everything to God.* No matter what may happen in the church, no matter what others may think or say about me, no matter what mistakes I might make, it does not change the fact that God still loves me.

My worth is not based on what I do. My value is not based on the fact that I am a pastor. God does not love me because I give Bible studies, preach good

loves me even though I am not a perfect pastor. I am infinitely valuable to Him. No one can change God’s love for me.

2. *I need to protect my daily devotional life at any cost.* A number of years ago, a group of pastors were asked to list their top five challenges in ministry. Almost every pastor listed that one of their greatest struggles was finding time to have meaningful daily devotions. According to a recent study of pastors in the North American Division, two-thirds of pastors were concerned about the difficulty of finding time for personal devotions.<sup>1</sup> After 20 years of ministry, I still believe that is true.

Preparing for a sermon, praying with someone, giving a Bible study—these are not my daily devotional life. *My daily devotional life* means the time I personally spend in God's presence allowing Him to touch my heart, speak to me, and draw me close to Him.

So, in order to keep my spiritual life alive, I need to spend time with Jesus every day. It needed to become my number one priority, because it was not. I had to make the choice that nothing will interfere with my personal time with Jesus. This does not mean I will not have problems. It does not mean I will never need counseling. But it does mean my house will be built on the Rock. It means the presence of Christ will be with me through the wind and the rain.

3. *My marriage must be nurtured.* My marriage has become the second most important relationship I have. It can make or break my ministry. If the devil wants to ruin my ministry, he will try to attack my marriage. The stress of a dysfunctional church can weigh heavily on a relationship.

No matter what it takes, I need to protect my time with Marquita. I realized the importance of having a date with her every week. I needed to spend time connecting with her on a regular basis. When my relationship with my spouse is positive, it gives me a foundation for handling the frustrations of ministry.

But, by far the best thing I can do to protect my marriage is to have a couple's devotional time. Take 10–15 minutes every morning to read something together. Then take each other's hands and pray. There is immense power in a husband and wife praying together. The devil cannot break such a union. I am sorry to say, it has taken me 20 years to realize how important this is, and I was foolish to neglect it.

4. *My passion must be restored.* I remembered the excitement I had when I first entered ministry. I remembered the passion I had for winning souls, but I had let the frustrations of ministry destroy that passion. Once you

lose your passion, ministry becomes drudgery. When you are just going through the motions, ministry is a joyless experience.

If you sense you are starting to lose your passion, do not ignore it. Talk to a trusted friend. Enlist the support of a mighty prayer warrior. Go to a Christian counselor. Take a couple days off and go to the mountains. Immerse yourself in the Psalms. Pour your heart out to God and get real with Him.

There is a special promise in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (NKJV). Then in the next chapter He promises to breathe life into those dry bones (Ezek. 37). That promise is for pastors too.

5. *There are more positives in ministry than negatives.* There are more things to rejoice about than to complain about. The problem remains that human nature tends to focus on the negative experiences because they hurt so deeply. They get embedded in the emotional recesses of our mind. Discouragement tends to give us "ministerial amnesia."

This is when I need to stop and reflect on the joy ministry has brought into my life. I need to remember the people whose lives have been touched by my ministry, moved by my sermons, blessed by my visits, and changed through my Bible studies.

You may want to create a "Joy Box" for ministry. Every time something special or significant happens, write it down or take a picture, and put it in your Joy Box. When someone gives you a note of appreciation or you have a memorable experience, store it in your Joy Box. Then, when times get tough and you start feeling like Elijah in the wilderness, get out your Joy Box and be reminded about all the precious moments you have probably forgotten.

6. *I need to remember my story.* Take time to remember how God called you into ministry. Remember the circumstances that led you to become a pastor. Reflect on how He opened the door,


removed the obstacles, and confirmed His call on your life.

For me, that meant remembering how God spoke to me during my senior year of college and moved me to take some religion classes even though I was a business major. This meant remembering how two years after I graduated with a business degree, I sensed that He wanted me to do something else. It meant remembering how I sent out resumés and a conference that had never knew me sponsored me to seminary—a miracle. It meant remembering how God led me to my wife, who would share that call to ministry. It meant remembering how I quit seminary and how God reopened the door to enter ministry a second time.

Ellen White once said, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us . . . in our past history."<sup>2</sup> Remember your story. It will awaken faith and courage. Nothing can ever change the fact that God called you.

## Pressing on

These are the lessons I learned from the valley of discouragement.<sup>3</sup> I did not enjoy the experience, but it did make me stronger. It did make me wiser. It did help me to remember how much I need Jesus.

Maybe you are going through a difficult time in ministry. Maybe you have been wounded and discouraged. Pour out your heart to the Savior. He will not forsake you. Ask Him to make these dry bones live again, and He will deliver you. He did it for me. He will for you too. 

1 David Sedlacek, Duane McBride, and Wendy Thompson, "Seminary Training, Role Demands, Family Stressors and Strategies for Alleviation of Stressors in Pastors' Families: Final Report to the North American Division Ministerial and Family Ministries Departments in conjunction with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists" (unpublished paper, September 8, 2014), 4.

2 Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), 196.

3 If you would like for me to speak on the topic of pastoral discouragement, contact me at davidmklinedinst@gmail.com or visit davidklinedinst.org.

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