

## Discouragement In The Ministry

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No matter how thrilling or rewarding ministry is, it is also very exhausting. Those who lead the children's ministry (CM) may also face philosophical or administrative challenges from the church leadership. Because of the sometimes overwhelming expectations, your sleep may be interrupted or not long enough. You may experience stress that effects your appetite as well. All of this is compounded by the fact that you are waging a spiritual war with the enemy who hates what you are doing! It is very natural and understandable for discouragement to set in deeply at times.



Discouragement may lead to a strong desire to quit. Many CM leaders experience this on a regular basis. You might go through "cycles" of extreme joy and then devastating discouragement. You are not alone in this experience. Jesus Himself endured these "cycles." He faced unimaginable stress and amazing joy. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane where He expressed His human feelings of sadness! His prayer was filled with exhaustion and human emotion. He ended His prayer with those powerful words, "...never the less, not my will, but your's be done."

In times of discouragement, it is very important for you to make sure that your feelings and decisions are based on God's leading and not on your emotions. God knows your human feelings. He lived for 33 years in a human body. He created your emotions! He gave you deep feelings as a "tool" to use in ministry! You couldn't do all you do for the children without your strong feelings! So, your feelings and emotions are both a blessing and a "curse."



When your discouragement leads you to thoughts of quitting, you need to take a moment to consider who or what is behind those feelings. Is God leading you to end your ministry? Or is He leading you to "gird your loins" and return to the battle with more passion?

One of the most significant scriptures related to the challenge of "staying or leaving" is found in 1 Corinthians 16: 8, 9. Here is what Paul writes to the Corinthians:

*"But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."*

Paul was very familiar with the challenges of ministry. He knew what it meant to "leave" and to "stay." He had been thrown out of cities, stoned, and escaped with his life over a wall at night. But, here in this passage, he gives us a glimpse of his criteria for deciding when to stay or leave. He chooses to "stay on" because of the "great door for effective work" that has opened to him. Staying, for Paul, was a choice. A determination that gave him the strength to endure the "many who oppose" him.



As you consider what to do, I urge you to remember who you are, and what God has given you there. Here is a partial list of truths that might apply:

1. You are called to children's ministry.
2. You are gifted in leading children to the Lord.
3. You have earned the respect of those who serve alongside you.
4. You have a loyal children's ministry team who have proven their faithfulness.
5. You have years of experience "under your belt" that produces deep wisdom.
6. You have a clear vision for children's ministry that isn't completed yet.

It doesn't seem consistent with God's character to permit you to become discouraged to the point of ignoring all of the above "doors of effective work" simply because there are some who oppose you. Your loving Father doesn't work that way. If He really wanted to call you away from your current position, it seems that He would do that in a way that doesn't discourage you and make you want to leave the ministry completely.

Although, God does call people in and out of ministries. I have learned to respect the call out of a ministry as much as the call into a ministry. If God is calling you out of the ministry, He would do so with peace in your heart and a vision for the next ministry. Paul traveled from one ministry area to the next. Yes, there were times in which he left ministries unwillingly. He was stoned at the end of one ministry (Acts 14: 8-19), and then escaped from another (Acts 9: 20-25). So, God does use hardships to move His people on. Is your discouragement a sign from God that your work there is over? This is a serious matter for which you must seek His wisdom! Pray with, and talk with those in your life who know you and whom you trust as godly people!



Discouragement is a well-used tool of the enemy. When you feel discouraged, you must realize the source and seek God's restoration. If you let discouragement have its full effect in you, the only option is to quit. Then, the enemy has won!

Exhaustion and discouragement are "natural" side-effects of ministry. But, throughout scripture, God has "poked" His servants to "get up" after short periods of restoration:

1. Elijah - after dealing with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 19).
2. Jonah - after dealing with the city of Ninevah (Jonah 4).
3. Elijah - after dealing with Ahab (1 Kings 17).
4. David - many times! (Psalm 27).
5. Peter - after denying Jesus (John 21).
6. Saul - after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

Yes, your options include quitting; but is that the best option? It is the "easiest" or "most logical," but is it what God wants?

Apart from the spiritual considerations, God has provided a good job, and maybe even good insurance. To quit would mean the end of stable income and insurance. Yes, God can provide for you apart from your current job, but why put all of that at risk? After a few weeks or months, you will calm down, and perhaps even forget your current emotions. Then, if you quit, you will not be in ministry and have given up all you worked so hard for. Let me tell you from experience, those will be dark days. You will miss the ministry greatly! You will now have to deal with the "ministry vacuum" you face. This may be a more discouraging factor than you realize.

Here's another option: become bold! Your natural character may be submissive, gentle, compliant, and humble. This is all good. It is why you have earned the respect and authority from those who serve alongside you. Maybe God is using this current "season" in your life and ministry to stir up the other side of your personality a bit. Maybe He wants you to stand firm and be a champion for the children! Maybe He wants you to become more vocal, more forceful, more compelled by the vision! Maybe instead of quitting, He wants you to get a little angry, and become a bold force to be reckoned with!



Look at it this way, what do you have to lose? If you quit, you and the ministry lose a lot. The children lose a lot! If you chose to stay and fight for the ministry, you could gain a lot. Yes, you could find yourself battling the "powers that be" on a whole new plane, but at least you would have the peace of knowing that you fought rather than retreated. The "worst case scenario" would be that you would be fired. If that happens, you would leave with your head held high knowing that you gave it your best and you were "shot in the line of duty" rather than quitting. At the very worst, it would be better for you than quitting. Here are some ideas for fighting for the rights of the ministry and advancing the vision in the face of opposition:

1. **Focus** on the children. Place a picture of a child, or children on your desk and ask God to help you put your eyes on them, instead of the "politics" or problems.
2. **Focus** on the vision. Reacquaint yourself with the vision. What has God called you to accomplish there?
3. **Remember** your dreams. What would you like to do with the children in your church and community? If you had all the money and personnel you needed, what would you do? Ask God to help you restore your passion! Think beyond Sundays! Think in terms of evangelism, missions, outreach, and invasion into the culture around you!
4. **Propose** an increase in your paid staff to assist in your ministry load. Create a proposal that is based on the vision, the potential growth, and your need for more help.
5. **Propose** an increase in your budget. This proposal must be connected to the vision and to specific new plans for ministry.
6. **Become** more vocal. At staff meetings and via phone and email, speak out about the needs, challenges, and victories of the children's ministry! Pastors and elders must hear your vision and talk about your dreams and plans in their meetings! Throw open the windows and the doors and let the light in! Do all of this with respect and professionalism.
7. **React** more strongly. If a decision is made the negatively effects the children's ministry, react to it! React right away, and also make appointments with those involved in the decisions to express your views. Do all of this with respect, but don't be quiet!
8. **Spread** the news and become more visible! Fight to get more announcements or inserts in the bulletin about children's ministry. Fight to share testimonies on stage during Sunday morning services. Fight to show videos of testimonies or success stories during Sunday morning services. Be consistent in this battle. Don't give up! Keep asking! Eventually, you will be given more exposure simply because of your consistent asking! Be tireless!
9. **Approach** those who disrespect you personally, rather than shrinking from them! Invite them to children's ministry events. Invite them to prayer times, meetings, socials, etc. Fight to bridge the gap between the children's ministry and the pastoral staff by actively building bridges you!
10. **Communicate** with the senior pastor weekly. Ask for weekly meetings between him and you to share joys, successes, challenges, and to pray together. This may frighten you just to think about it, but you must not let him be disconnected from your world! Send him "weekly updates" via email if you can't meet with him weekly.
11. **Start** new programs and expect your senior pastor's support. Be consistent in beginning new programs and asking him to support it from the pulpit.



You have given so much to this ministry. God could be doing something new with you! Ask Him for clarity, new vision, and the same passion that drove the early Church in spite of enormous opposition! The same Holy Spirit can give you that same passion!