

Staying or Leaving In Biblical Perspective

Steve Alley

Ministry is a challenge. It drains you of your physical energy. It rocks your emotional stability. It can even lead you to question your spiritual condition. But, for all these challenges, being involved in ministry can be the most exhilarating, satisfying experience in your life. Where else can you look back over your daily activities and say, with all certainty, “I made an eternal difference today”?

The “entrance” into a ministry is just as significant as the “exit” from it. God calls, leads, and moves people in and out of positions within His Kingdom according to His will and pleasure. The challenge for you is to read, interpret, and follow God’s direction.

God’s creation is established with seasons. He accomplishes His will through “seasons” in your life as well. *“There is a time for every purpose under heaven,”* says Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3. Your “season” with a ministry begins and ends according to God’s timing. The challenge for you is to recognize the “changing seasons,” and follow God.



Just because the ministry is “hard” doesn’t mean that God is ending your “season” there. Throughout scripture, God uses “hard times” to accomplish His will in individuals and in groups. Perseverance is one of God’s treasured qualities that He desires you to have. Staying in a “hard” ministry might be exactly what He wants you to do. You need to seek God for clarity and establish the confidence within yourself that you are accomplishing God’s will by staying or leaving. This is a spiritual challenge. If God hasn’t clearly revealed His will for you in this moment, here are some scriptural principles that may help you discern His “opinions” about your condition.

Biblical foundations

1. God desires to be Lord of all you are, do, or value:
 - a. “And you shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength...”(Mark 12: 30)
 - b. “I am the Lord, your God, you shall have no other gods before me...” (Exodus 20: 1-6)
 - c. “...in all your ways, acknowledge Him...” (Proverbs 3: 5-7)
2. You are to become a new person with the Holy Spirit’s power:
 - a. “Therefore, if any (one) is in Christ, he is a new person...” (2 Corinthians 5: 17)
 - b. “...be transformed, by the renewing of your mind...” (Romans 12: 1,2)
3. You are to be an example of Godliness in your home:
 - a. “...and these words...you shall teach them diligently to your (children)...”(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
 - b. “Train up a child in the way he should go...” (Proverbs 22: 6)
4. God places those in authority over you:
 - a. “For there is no authority except from God...” (Romans 13: 1-8)
 - b. “...do not touch my anointed ones...” (Psalm 105: 15)
5. Trials may be a tool of God to develop your character:
 - a. “Consider it all joy...when you encounter various trials...” (James 1: 2-12)
 - b. “...all things work together for good for those who love Him...” (Romans 8: 26-28)

Examples of People Staying

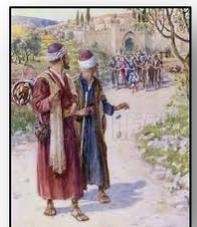
1. **The Israelites** (when they were in Egypt) – Exodus 7-11
 - a. They stayed in Egypt, under harsh conditions, waiting to be freed
 - b. “Staying” can be very hard; even deadly.
 - c. Staying may be physically and emotionally hard for you.
2. **The Israelites** (when they were in the wilderness) – Numbers 9: 18-22
 - a. They stayed at a place until “the cloud” or the “pillar of fire” moved
 - b. “Staying” was waiting for God to move ahead of them, and lead them.
 - c. God will tell you when it is time to go.
3. **Jonah** (after he finally arrived in Nineveh) – Jonah 3, 4
 - a. He did what God wanted him to do, got discouraged, “withdrew,” got chastised.
 - b. “Staying” may mean putting up with different outcomes than you expected.
4. **Elijah** (when he fled from Jezebel) – 1Kings 19
 - a. He was exhausted, frightened, discouraged after God used him and Jezebel threatened him.
 - b. For days, he fled and rested. God fed him and gave him water.
 - c. Finally, in the cave, God confronted him with his calling (after he slept a night).
 - d. God understands your exhaustion, and cares for your needs while you stay.
5. **Jesus’ parents** (stayed in Egypt until God said it was safe to return to Israel) – Matthew 2: 13-23
 - a. They listened to God as He protected them.
 - b. “Staying” may require a deeper intimacy with God to endure the inconvenience.
 - c. God will tell you when it is time to go.
6. **Jesus** (when He stayed to teach in the temple as a youth) – Luke 2: 41-49
 - a. He did what God wanted Him to do – regardless of the consequences.
 - b. “Staying” may cause misunderstandings in your parents.
 - c. You must do what God wants no matter what.
7. **Jesus** (when He stayed for two days with the Samaritans) – John 4: 39-43
 - a. He stayed because of the interest and spiritual hunger of the people.
 - b. “Staying” is directly tied to the spiritual impact we have on those to whom we minister.
 - c. As long as you are being used, God may want you to stay.
8. **The Apostles** (when they stayed in Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit) – Acts 1: 1-4
 - a. They stayed to wait for power, strength, vision, and permission to leave.
 - b. “Staying” may be a proactive, positive act to await God’s blessing or power.
 - c. Staying and waiting are two qualities of leaders that God desires.
9. **Peter** (when he stayed in a town for two days with Simon, the tanner) – Acts 9: 43
 - a. Peter found a “friend,” then stayed close to him for encouragement.
 - b. “Staying” is made more possible with the help of friendly, hospitable, people.
 - c. Your relationships with others is critical to your being able to stay.
10. **Paul and Barnabas** (when they stayed in Iconium in spite of unrest against them) – Acts 14: 1-3
 - a. They were “encouraged” by the “persecution” and unrest.
 - b. “Staying,” even in the face of unrest, is possible when God is obviously moving and working.
 - c. The “thrill” of seeing God work gives you the strength to stay and continue.



11. **Paul and Barnabas** (when they stayed in Macedonia for “some days”) – Acts 16: 6-13
 - a. They knew they were doing what God wanted them to do, and they survived on that peace.
 - b. “Staying” comes as a result of a clear vision from God.
 - c. When you seek, and receive, a vision from God, you are able to withstand much.
12. **Paul** (when he determined to stay in Ephesus in spite of opposition) – 1 Corinthians 16: 8, 9
 - a. He focused on the “great door of effective work” that God opened for him there.
 - b. “Staying” is a choice based on the opportunities, in spite of the opposition
 - c. When you realize the potential for ministry, you can endure the frustrations

Examples of People Leaving

1. **The Israelites** (when they left Egypt) – Exodus 13
 - a. They were “freed” from Egypt by their harsh dictator.
 - b. God had accomplished their freedom through trials.
 - c. Leaving may not happen on your timing – God’s timing is perfect.
2. **Elijah** (when he fled Jezebel’s wrath) – 1 Kings 19
 - a. Elijah left for his own protection, and God cared for his needs in his leaving.
 - b. God’s calling didn’t change – He told Elijah to return to his calling.
 - c. God’s purpose for you there must be finished before you leave.
3. **Jesus’ parents** (when they left Bethlehem to protect Jesus) – Matthew 2:13
 - a. They followed God’s command to leave in order to protect Jesus and themselves.
 - b. “Leaving” may be the only thing to do to protect you, or your family’s health.
 - c. Evil people, at times, must be avoided.
4. **Jesus** (when He walked away from dangerous people) – Luke 4: 28-30
 - a. Jesus had a sense that He “didn’t need to deal with these people” any longer.
 - b. “Leaving” may be the only thing to do when people are closed-minded or too angry.
 - c. Engaging angry or hurtful people isn’t safe. You may need to leave to let them calm down.
5. **Peter and Andrew** (when they left their jobs as fishermen to follow Jesus) – Matthew 4: 18-20
 - a. Doing something that was Kingdom-focused was worth more than doing their jobs.
 - b. “Leaving” what is not God’s work, and following Jesus is expected of us all.
 - c. Leaving may require a sacrifice and a new level of trust in God.
6. **Jesus’ disciples** (when He instructed them as they evangelized the country) – Matthew 10: 11-15
 - a. Spreading the Gospel was more important than staying and battling personal “issues.”
 - b. “Leaving” is permitted when your ‘blessing’ is not valued, and your energies are wasted.
 - c. Time is short. You must go where your efforts produce the most fruit for the Kingdom.
7. **Jesus** (when He finished saying what He came to say in Galilee) – Matthew 13: 53
 - a. Jesus’ clear sense of His mission kept Him moving.
 - b. “Leaving” is the next thing to do when you have finished what God sent you to do.
 - c. Being aware of the vision, calling, and timing of God is critical.
8. **Paul and Barnabas** (when they fled Iconium to protect themselves) – Acts 14: 4-7
 - a. They knew that God wasn’t finished with them yet, so they left to protect their future work.
 - b. “Leaving” a dangerous situation in order to continue being used by God is important.
 - c. The focus must be on the spread of the Gospel, not just on your comfort.



Questions To Consider

The decision to stay or leave is a deeply spiritual process. Your exhaustion or frustration can lead to doubts. The important thing to do is to see what is happening through God's eyes and not your own. Here are some questions to help you seek God's wisdom. Be honest with yourself as you consider these questions.

1. Am I doing what God called me to do here? Is His vision clear and strong?
2. Is my reason for doing what I do financial, or spiritual?
3. If God clearly told me to "leave," would I?
4. Is my work completed? What would "completed" mean?
5. Do the conflicts I face challenge me into a deeper awareness of my vision or calling?
6. If I stay, what is "at risk"?
7. If I leave, what is "at risk"?
8. Are my thoughts of leaving based on selfishness, laziness, discouragement or fear?
9. If I leave, and begin a new ministry at another church, will I find myself at this point again?
10. Have I really done all I can do to make this environment "work" for me?
 - a. Spiritual introspection – ("What am I doing to cause this unrest?") Psalm 139: 23, 24
 - b. Sought counsel from others – ("Tell me what you think.") Proverbs 11: 14
 - c. Prayed for help, wisdom, direction – ("I'm too close to this, I need help.") Proverbs 3: 5-7
 - d. Spoken truthfully with administrators – ("I'm feeling uncomfortable.") John 8: 32
 - e. Been willing to sacrifice or compromise – ("I'm willing to do my part.") 2 Thessalonians 3: 7-9

Regardless of the results of your search, the answer to your question about staying or going is always, "Yes, Lord." If He tells you to stay, you say, "Yes, Lord, I'll do the best I can in your strength." If He tells you to leave, you say, "Yes, Lord, I'll apply all you have taught me so far to make the next ministry even better!" When you submit to His will, you will find that "peace that passes all understanding."

