

# 3 Terrible Ways to Measure the Success of Your Ministry

First things first, I believe the Bible calls all of us into ministry. As followers of Christ, sharing the gospel (Mark 16:15), making disciples (Matt. 28:19), and caring for those in need (Matt. 25:35-40) are tasks assigned to all of us.

And probably in anticipation of our tendency to compare, God makes it clear in His Word that the ways we minister may look different, but it all matters. Just like the parts of a body are all needed, each of us must do our part for Christ's body to work at maximum efficiency (1 Cor. 12).

Having a ministry can look a million different ways:

- It might look like teaching kindergarten Sunday school.
- It might look like mentoring a young, single mom.
- It might look like leading worship.
- It might look like writing books.
- It might look like raising children to know and follow Christ.
- It might look like managing a blog.
- It might look like knitting warm hats.
- It might look like praying like crazy.

I could keep going, but there really isn't space inside my brain or in this blog post to paint a picture of all of the forms that ministry can take.

So, if you are a Christian seeking to live like God calls you to live, chances are you have a ministry.

I've learned the hard way that when it comes to ministry, too often we use the wrong ruler to gauge our success. Maybe you've fallen into the same trap. Here are three terrible ways to measure the impact of your ministry.

## **1. People love you.**

Selling a bajillion books, gaining oodles of Twitter followers, packing the seats of a sanctuary ... these are not good indicators of successful ministry. We tend to think that if people are showing up with smiles on their faces, God is blessing, but this is not the pattern we see in the Bible.

How's this for a mind-bending truth?

*"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23, ESV).*

The Bible doesn't say you're blessed when everyone pats you on the back. It doesn't say it's awesome when you've been propelled to superstardom in the kingdom of Christ. Nope. The Bible says we should jump up and down with joy when people hate us. We should rejoice when we are left out because of our faith. We are in the company of the spiritual giants who go before us when our ministry repels some people instead of drawing them in.

There is a balance to be struck here. If the gospel is your core message, growth is a good thing. As you are impacting people for the kingdom, they are bound to want to pat you on the back. But if you stick your finger into the wind of public opinion to determine the success of your kingdom work, it will feel like a wild goose chase.

## **2. There is immediate fruit.**

I once mentored a young woman named Amanda. Every single Wednesday for more than a year, I picked her up from school, took her out for pizza and tried to get her to care about Jesus. She was a closed book! She sealed up her heart like a

vault at Fort Knox. She never opened up to me, never showed enthusiasm for what I was showing her in the Word, never gave any indication of interest in the things of God.

If you had asked me during that year, or in the several years following, if my ministry with Amanda was fruitful, I would have said, "No way!" But there was growth in Amanda's heart I could not yet see.

Fast forward nearly ten years, and I got a letter from Amanda. She told me what a difference that year made in her life. She wrote about God's Word like the living and active book I so wanted her to take interest in. She told me she's now a wife and a momma, seeking to honor Jesus in her home. Spiritual fruit hung in big bunches from her life, but it didn't grow quickly. That growth took years.

In Matthew 13:4-9 Jesus told us this would happen.

*"And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."*

Did you know that radishes grow quickly? In only 25 days you can plant a radish seed and then pull it up and eat it with your dinner. Pears, on the other hand, grow slowly. It can take up to twelve years for a pear to grow from a seed to ripe, juicy fruit, ready to eat.

I don't know about you, but I'd take a pear over a radish any day of the week. Sometimes the best fruit takes time to develop. That's as true in ministry as it is in vegetable

gardening.

Just because the impact isn't immediately felt, doesn't mean what you're doing for the kingdom isn't fruitful.

### **3. The sailing is smooth.**

Confession: I wrote this blog post for myself. I have a bad habit of throwing my hands in the air and assuming I'm doing ministry all wrong whenever the road gets rocky. But the Bible says that trials are simply par for the course. In fact, we can respond to trials with that same jumping-up-and-down joy that we do to criticism because they help us minister for the long haul.

*"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).*

If he was using ease as the gauge for success, Paul would have hung up his hat. Likewise, we shouldn't determine our effectiveness by whether or not the going is easy. (Did you hear that, Erin?)

## **Who's In Charge of Growth?**

So how can you know if you are ministering effectively? It may seem crazy ... but I'm not sure you can.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Paul said this about ministry. "I planted, Apollos watered, *but God gave the growth*. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (emphasis added).

Ultimately, the fruit of your efforts isn't up to you. You

can't predict how God will grow your ministry nor can you control it. You can be faithful, looking for opportunities to share and to serve everywhere you go, and at the end of the day, you can lay down your garden tools and trust God with the fruit.

Speaking of gardens and fruit, here's a promise for all who minister. There will be a harvest, friend. I look forward to reaping it together with you.

*"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9).*

What promises keep you going as you do ministry for the kingdom?

Taken from Erin Davis's blog post "3 Terrible Ways to Measure the Success of Your Ministry." . Used with permission.