

7 Tips When You Are Frustrated Enough to Quit

I was talking to a staff member of a church recently who is ready to quit. But he can't.

What he's experiencing is not depression, in my opinion. It could turn into that at some point, if he's not careful, but today it's frustration. Severe frustration. The kind that keeps you up at night.

The problems appear to be more external than internal. They are work-related, but they are impacting every other aspect of his life. (They always do.)

It's a poor work environment. He is frustrated because he has given everything he knows to give, but nothing seems to matter. He feels under-appreciated, under-utilized and unfulfilled. He's treated lousy by a controlling leader who never acknowledges his accomplishments. He's tried confronting gently, firmly and directly.

Nothing he does or says makes things better. This staff person is going home every night wishing he didn't have to return the next day. It's a miserable life, and so far nothing is changing. And he's miserable—more miserable every day. He's ready to quit, but so far he has sensed no release from God in this position and believes he is supposed to stay for now. So what does he do?

(By the way, I don't think God always leaves us in situations like this. These times always serve a purpose in our life, but many times God releases us to pursue a healthier environment. Don't confuse loyalty to a bad leader with obedience to God. They aren't always the same. That requires walking close enough to God to discern His will.)

There will be times when, apart from any God-calling, the economics, timing or other personal or family situations dictate you stay for now. What do you do then?

Here's the reality I had to share with him: The truth is, we can't control our environment. We can't control other people and their reactions to us. We can only control how we respond to life.

Here are seven things I encouraged him to do:

1. Pray. That's an obvious answer, but it's the most powerful answer. The question I had for him is, "Have you really prayed? Have you prayed for God to change the circumstances or for Him to change you?" There's a huge difference in those two prayers.

2. Remember the good times. I keep a file of memories—notes I've received of encouragement; emails that came at "just the right time." I store them in a special file and, on especially difficult days, I pull out this file and review better days. My life has been filled with seasons. Some good and some bad. I want to remember the good times when I'm experiencing the bad. And I'm always encouraged looking back that better days are ahead. Again.

3. Share your burdens. Now is not the time to be proud. You need some people with whom you can share your burdens. Be honest. Listen, pastor, don't believe the lie that pastors have to live life alone. You don't. Find someone in another church. Find a trusted leader in the church. Don't share with a motive to stir trouble, and don't gossip, but be honest. Share your side, not anyone else's. The goal is to get the support of a listening ear you need. (Don't be afraid to get professional help if needed.)

4. Rest. Many times, in my experience, these days come most when we are tired. Feelings. Would it be better to disappear for a short time or disappear altogether? You can't sustain

your best work long when you are experiencing these emotions, and that will only make your life more miserable. Get away and rest. *Now.*

5. Renew your heart. Remind yourself of the vision to which you were called. You weren't called to an environment or to the pastor of a church or even to a church. You were called to a Person. Jesus. He loves you. He wants to invest in you. He has a plan for your life. Lean into Him again, and allow Him to restore your passion for Him that is bigger than the place where He has you now.

6. Do what you can. Do the best work you can within the ministry context you are called to. You may not be able to impact the entire church, but you can impact your individual ministry, even if it's only by impacting the people within your ministry. You'll need to find your fulfillment in smaller wins right now, but allow those moments in ministry to fuel you and keep you going.

7. Learn all you can. We learn most in the hardest days. Those aren't necessarily helpful words to hear in times like this, but they are so incredibly true. Keep a journal of your experiences—what happens and how you feel about them. You will use these insights in the days to come and look back on this as a significant growth experience personally and professionally. If you learn things that make you better later, this won't be a wasted period of your life and ministry, but may even prove to be a valuable period.

That was my advice. Have you ever been in that kind of situation? What would you add to this list?

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