

When Ministry Doesn't Go the Way We Plan

I sat at my computer in the basement that chilly Sunday evening in North Dakota, pounding out a long email to my sister that could rival *War and Peace*. A missionary had visited our church and shared with us what the Lord was doing in the country where he and his family served. It touched a deep place in my heart, as I was preparing to leave for the mission field in a few months.

I was overflowing with excitement. In my mind's eye, I could see an amazing work of God: a revival, an awakening, a New Testament church arising to power and victory in Jesus and the kingdom of God advanced with authority!

The passion of this vision surged through me as I sorted through my belongings, deciding what could fit into my limited luggage and what would have to stay behind or be given away. It wasn't easy, but that vision in my heart enabled me to make the hard choices. And I embarked on a journey that looks nothing like what it did that wintery night in North Dakota.

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This August will mark my 10th-year anniversary on the mission field. And I can say with full assurance that nothing—*literally nothing*—has gone as I dreamed it would. Why, then, does God give us these visions and dreams, if He knows they will not come about as we thought?

1. The human prism. I contend that much of what I envisioned was more “Rosilind” than God. There were elements of God's plan in that vision, but they were wrapped with, entertained with and heavily seasoned with my own ambitions. And while ambition is most often rooted in pride, I believe God does

understand that we “see through the glass darkly.” He gives us a vision that we simply can’t see the way He sees it because He is divine and we are human. We can only see through the prism of what we know.

As I prepared for my journey here where I serve, I approached it from an American perspective. That was the only perspective I knew. But what works in America doesn’t work in Croatia, and it took me several years to learn what *does* work here, and that knowledge has given me the wisdom I need to minister in a way that is effective.

2. We couldn’t bear it. Had God revealed to me then what I have experienced these past 10 years, I am fairly sure I would have never left America. While these 10 years have been sprinkled with amazing events, such as meeting my husband, getting married, having two beautiful babies, buying our first home and meeting some of the loveliest people I’ve ever known, they have also been laced with some pretty hard times. Disappointment, failure and great loneliness mark major milestones in this journey of mission work.

God doesn’t tell us the whole story for a reason. It would terrify us with its greatness, wonder and, yes, disappointment. And as I ponder this truth, I am reminded of something Corrie ten Boom wrote in her book *The Hiding Place*. She shares how her father illustrated the way God leads us through these times. He doesn’t give us the grace for the journey until we need it. But when we need it, it is there in abundance for us to not only survive the journey, but to victoriously win this race with our arms stretched out as we soar across the finish line.

3. We must die. A major element to ministry is death. While I know that sounds morbid and is frankly not very encouraging, it is true. Jesus was the first to mention this with regard to ministry. He told His disciples that if they were not willing to take up their cross—a symbol of death—and follow Him, they

were not worthy to be His disciples. In ministry we must die. We must die to our **visions**. We must die to our **ambitions**. We must die to our **plans**. We must die to **ourselves**. If we don't, we will never see fruit.

Jesus illustrated this for us with a seed. He said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."

When a seed lies in the ground, it rots. It dies. But from death comes life—a tender shoot, then tiny leaves. As the shoot grows and strengthens, flowers begin to bloom, and then nourishing fruit grows. All of that beauty and nourishment come from death. If we refuse to lay down our dreams, visions, ambitions and self and bury them, we will never experience the true life of Christ and fruit of the kingdom in our ministry.

As I look back on that night 10 years ago and recall those dreams and ambitions, I can't help but chuckle a bit. They were immature and filled with deadly pride. During my time here, I have struggled to hang onto those selfish dreams, been forced to let them go, cried tears of loss and disappointment, considered myself a miserable failure, and come to peace with the fact that I cannot—*must not*—live. It must be Christ who lives in me—and He must work through me. And the joy of death, the sweet aroma of that sacrifice, is worth the loss. Because in dying we live, and in being destitute of self, we are rich in Him.

This is when ministry truly becomes ministry!

*Reprinted with permission from Missional Women. **Rosilind Jukic** is an American girl married to a Bosnian guy who lives in a small village just outside of Zagreb. They have two crazy boys 3 and under who are as opposite as boys can be. When Rosilind isn't writing, she is dreaming up recipes and searching for ways to organize her home better. You can find her at A Little R & R, where she writes about missions, marriage and family, toddler activities and her recipes.*