

Beware of Oncoming Stupidity!

If you aspire to ministry, don't be stupid. Decide now to avoid these obvious pitfalls so you can finish well.

I shared a pulpit with Dr. Mary Ann Brown two times. She was bold and painfully blunt. People who hate women preachers hated her even more because of her no-nonsense sermons, always delivered in her Texas twang. She would get her audience laughing and then skewer them with a hot blade of truth.

When Mary Ann died last October, I remembered the last words she said to me when we were together at a conference in Chicago in 2011. After lamenting the fact that so many ministers were failing, she locked eyes with me and said with stern, motherly authority: "Lee, please don't ever get stupid."

I've pondered her words often since her death. I don't want to be stupid; I want to finish well. So how can we avoid spiritual stupidity? We can start by avoiding these 10 mistakes that have become common in our movement during the past decade:

1. **Take illegal drugs.** I know people who never got complete deliverance from their drug habit. When the pressures of ministry grew intense they turned to illegal substances to escape. If you allow drugs or alcohol to control your actions, you have no business in ministry.
2. **Reject accountability.** The Lone Ranger was an intriguing comic book hero, but isolation doesn't work in real life. Lack of accountability is stupid! If you don't answer to people smarter than you, you are an accident waiting to happen. You have no right to be in authority if you are not under authority.
3. **Beat or abuse your wife.** The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:7 that God will not listen to your prayers if you mistreat

your wife. If you are an abuser (and even if you are a master at hiding your sin from others), the Lord will oppose you until you seek help.

4. **Surround yourself with adoring fans.** Years ago, fallen PTL founder Jim Bakker said his biggest mistake was planting “yes men” around him instead of people who had the guts to challenge his bad decisions. If you aren’t willing to invite input—including criticism—from your followers, you are a weak leader headed for disaster.
5. **Fake spiritual gifts to impress others.** In our movement there is pressure to produce the sensational in order to keep people entertained. But if you stoop so low as to fake a healing or push someone to the floor, the Holy Spirit will step away and let you run the sideshow without His power. It’s stupid to mix strange fire and risk offending God!
6. **Be lenient toward sexual sin.** Many preachers celebrate “grace” but refuse to label fornication, adultery, homosexuality or pornography as sins. If you are casual about sexual sin in your own life, or if you don’t require purity among those you lead, you are stupid.
7. **Manipulate people during the offering time.** Ministers often use hypnotic mind games to raise funds on Christian television. Nobody challenges their fraud, so it seems they get away with it. Be assured that these people will answer to God for their deception. You are stupid if you try these tactics in your church.
8. **Refuse to share power.** I meet ministers who have been leading their churches or organizations for 30 years and yet have no succession plan in place. That is dumb! Train the next generation now so they will be ready to lead in your place.
9. **Teach exotic doctrines.** We charismatics tend to feed people a “flavor of the month” to satisfy the craving for angels, gold dust, gold teeth, manna, heavenly portals and indoor rain clouds. But history has proven that those who make spiritual manifestations a focus end

up in deception. Let's keep the main thing the main thing. Focus on Jesus!

10. **Become an egomaniac.** Some of America's biggest religious stars have gone loony because of pride. They require private jets, bodyguards and personal chefs while maintaining a cold aloofness from the people they are called to serve. If you let Satan dupe you into becoming an arrogant ministry diva, you are stupid. Repent and start acting like Christ instead of a rock star.

In memory of my late friend Mary Ann Brown, I pass on her advice to you: "Please don't ever get stupid." Let's grow up, reject foolishness and aim to finish well.

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