

# If You're Called to Ministry, There's a Price to Pay

I served the Lord as a journalist for many years before God called me into the ministry. And I ran from that call for a while, mostly because of my fears. It didn't help when I examined the lives of the ministers I knew. It was obvious they paid a high price.

Ministry isn't glamorous, in spite of what you may see on some Instagram accounts. When you answer God's call, you put your life on the line. Just ask the apostle Paul, who told the Galatians, "From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 6:17, MEV). The Greek word for "marks" is *stigma*, and it refers to the marks that were burned into the flesh of a slave to show who owned him. Paul was saying, "I have the scars to prove I serve Jesus."

Ministry has a long list of occupational hazards, and I do an injustice to any young leader if I don't warn him or her of what might happen on the job. I'm not sharing this to scare anybody. But if you know you are called to any ministry position, whether full-time, part-time or volunteer, you should at least read the fine print before signing on the dotted line. Out of love, I offer these warnings to anyone who is enlisting in this war:

– **The devil will attack you and your loved ones.** I don't focus on the devil or his demons, but it's foolish to ignore hell's schemes. Satan hates ministers. Your enemy plays dirty. Paul spoke to the Ephesians about "our struggle" with demonic forces (Eph. 6:12). Welcome to the conflict! You must learn to fight both defensively and offensively using the spiritual weapons God provides us.

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– **People will hurt you.** Christians are called “saints” in the New Testament, but you will be tempted to call them other choice words when you are on the receiving end of their criticism, complaints and cruelty. Christians are redeemed sinners, and the Holy Spirit lives inside them. But they are still sinners. Don’t let resentment grow in your heart if you are attacked, rejected or slandered. Develop a thick skin, and learn to love and forgive—knowing that you are just as capable of their behavior.

– **You will face discouragement often.** The devil uses psychological warfare to demoralize us. You must resist his tactics. British preacher Charles Spurgeon told his students that he often got depressed after intense ministry. He wrote, “How often, on Lord’s-day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers which a child might break.” Don’t be shocked when heavy feelings come.

– **Your pride will be wounded.** You may think your sermon was awesome, but some people will yawn, some will sleep and others will remind you of the points you missed. Don’t let the criticism make you bitter; allow it to nail your flesh to the cross so you can remember that ministry isn’t about you anyway.

– **Your heart will be broken.** You will invest your time and energy into people who eventually walk away without even thanking you. Sometimes a close disciple may prove to be a Judas. Don’t let disappointment close your heart to people. Keep on loving and giving, despite the heartache.

– **Your knees will become calloused.** Good leaders know that prayer is the fuel that keeps them going. As long as hands are raised to heaven and hearts are bowed low, heaven’s oil will

not run out. But there will be painful times when your answer is delayed. Press through, in spite of the anguish. Never let the flame of prayer go out in your personal life. Let the tough times drive you into your prayer closet.

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– **Your priorities will be turned upside down.** For me, God's call included traveling—which meant spending lots of time away from home. I would rather sleep in my own bed than in a strange bed in Uganda or India, but when you pray, "Here I am, Lord, send me," you do not have the luxury of controlling your own schedule.

– **Your dreams will be misunderstood.** Joseph was thrown in a pit after he shared his dream. David's brothers questioned his motives when he came to the battle to challenge Goliath. Anyone who attempts great things for God will be maligned. If you are worried about your reputation, or you want everyone to say nice things about you, don't pursue a ministry career.

– **Your faith will be stretched to the breaking point.** God gave Moses a stick and told him to split the Red Sea. He told Gideon to win a battle with 300 untrained soldiers. God asks leaders to look beyond natural circumstances and believe in His supernatural ability. This is never comfortable. Jesus calls us out of our boat and onto the water. Get used to it.

Embrace your calling with full surrender. But be prepared to receive the scars, knowing that, as Paul said in Romans 8:18, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

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