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How to Keep from Losing Heart In Ministry

Dave Earley

Too many small group leaders start out highly motivated, and full of optimism and energy. But within a few years, they lose heart. They either give in to find themselves merely going through the motions, or they give up leadership all together.

It's understandable really. The moment you step up to lead, you place a target on your back. You attract a greater level of enemy attention than ever before. Beyond that, because a small group is a haven and refuge for people in great need, it can be a place of great difficulty, extreme fatigue and seemingly endless frustration for those who attempt to minister to those needs. Life is messy, people have problems, and ministry is often chaotic and frustrating as well.

Calling people to a life of discipleship can be disappointing. Even Jesus had dropouts and disappointments.

Very few small group leaders face the level of temptation to quit that the apostle Paul dealt with. How did he keep from losing heart in the ministry despite such intense difficulties? He lived with an eternal perspective.

In 2 Corinthians chapter four, Paul pulled back the veil to give us a look into his view of ministry. He reveals several essentials for maintaining the right perspective.

Be Grateful

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. – 1 Corinthians 4:1 The Message

We get discouraged and want to quit when we feel that we are entitled to more or better. Don't forget, being allowed to minister to others is a gift to be appreciated, not a right to be demanded. We only minister because God is merciful to allow messed up "ex-sinners," like myself, to have the privilege and honor of serving Him by ministering to His people.

Keep it Real

We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God. - 2 Corinthians 4:2 The Message

The *persona* is the mask that was worn in ancient Greek tragedy. Psychologists speak of the *persona* as that psychological mask that we put over our real inner feelings when we relate to others. It takes a great deal of energy to keep the *persona* polished and clean. Wearing one can make us appear artificial

or fake. Therefore, invest your time and effort being your best self, as opposed to trying to be someone you aren't.

Reflect Christ, not Self

Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you... If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. As it is, there's not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we're not much to look at. - 2 Corinthians 4:5-7
The Message

I find the most energy in ministry comes when I take God very seriously and don't take myself too seriously. We last in ministry when we learn to accept our shortcoming, admit our mistakes, and laugh at ourselves as we place the focus on Christ.

Stay Positive

We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us—trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them, he does in us—he lives! Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us. While we're going through the worst, you're getting in on the best! ... Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise!

- 2 Corinthians 4:8-15 The Message

Paul was gifted at seeing the spiritual, the eternal, and the positive in every circumstance. His suffering actually brought him joy because he was able to see how God was using it to multiply his ministry. Therefore, he did not let any setback leave him discouraged.

Focus on the Invisible Glory of Eternity

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the

eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever. - 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 The Message

Eternity is a very long time. As you serve the Lord as a small group leader, you are making investments that will last forever.

Therefore, don't give up!

One day, it will be worth it all!

Dr. Dave Earley is an experienced pastor, small group leader, church planter and coach. He serves as the Director of the Liberty Center for Church Planting at Liberty University. He is also Chairman of the Department of Pastoral Leadership and Church Planting for Liberty Theological Seminary. He has authored ten books on subjects such as small groups, leadership, prayer, and the Christian life. www.daveearley.com This article is an excerpt from his new book (w/ Rod Dempsey) *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group: 52 Ways to Help You and Your Small Group Grow* www.touchusa.org