

Ministry Is Messy

By Kris Swiatocho

A friend recently reminded me of something that I have often said: “Ministry can be very messy because the ministry has people in it.” My good friend and advisor, Pastor Freddy Johnson, used to say, “Kris, I would like to find a pastor position without having to deal with people...so that it would be...well...easy!” When he would say this, we would laugh because that position doesn't exist. If you are going to do any kind of work where people are involved, it will be challenging.

So then, as a Pastor or staff, how do you keep from wanting to quit and change careers? How do you keep from quitting as a lay leader or a volunteer? How do you prevent your frustration with people from affecting your work, calling, and ministry? Here are some practical alternatives to consider:

**1. Learn the skill of not responding to people when you first feel attacked, bothered, or aggravated.** Listen, affirm that you are listening, and then pray for how God would have you respond. Sometimes people just want to be heard be validated. Sometimes the Lord may tell you to say nothing at all.

**2. Pray ahead of time for the more challenging people, knowing you will have to work with them, minister alongside them, etc.** Pray, ask the Lord to show you how to handle things, communicate, and respond so that you build bridges rather than walls.

**3. Confirm that when the Lord does tell you to say nothing, affirm whether it's for that moment or forever.** There are people that God will take out of your life and vice versa (for His purpose) as you go about His work. Also, not every battle is your battle. You could be brought into a situation that is someone else's to deal with. Allow the other person to hear from God and then offer your support as needed. Ultimately, the battle belongs to the Lord anyway.

**4. Learn how to handle the “messy.” Maybe it's taking baby steps in dealing with the situation; perhaps you need to get additional advice or support**; maybe you need to put boundaries in place. Perhaps God has placed you in the situation to grow and prepare you for the even more significant challenges that are coming.

The bottom line is that ministry is messy. Still, maybe God has chosen you to help declutter, to add organization and clarity--pointing everyone and everything to Christ because He’s truly the only one who can clean it up and keep it clean!

***1 Cor 14:40*** *But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

***Ephesians 4:1-7****I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,  eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*