

# Potential Pitfall in Ministry

by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a vital, growing, intimate love relationship with the Lord Jesus, and avoiding the pitfalls of losing the wonder, neglecting personal relationship with the Lord, and proclaiming truth we're not living.*

**Duration:** 1:03:11

**Scripture:** Luke 10:38

**Topics:** "Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of finding ways to pull away from the demands and noise of life in order to tend to our relationship with God. He shares a personal decision he made to not watch television when he is alone, as it was draining his spiritual passion. The speaker also warns against proclaiming truth that we are not living ourselves, highlighting the accountability and responsibility that comes with ministry. He encourages listeners to serve as those who will give account and to remember their dependence on Christ, rather than succumbing to pride and self-sufficiency.

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## Transcript

Said to me just a few moments ago, thank you so much for the way that you speak the truth without flinching. And I looked at her and I said, well, I don't do it without flinching. I do it with fear and trembling, but encouraged by other believers who've walked ahead of me and have paved the way and have shown what it is to speak the Word of God with courage and with conviction.

What a privilege it is for me to be here as a learner. To sit at the feet of the Lord and to be washed with the water of His Word and to learn from some of these men who've walked with God and been faithful soldiers. In fact, the material that's on my heart to share this morning, I really feel that there are many men in this room who are far more qualified and have a much more extensive life message than what I'm going to share.

I think about men like Dr. Bubeck and Dr. Dickinson and others who have shown us what it is to walk with the Lord faithfully. And the scripture says, whose faith imitate. So we walk in the train of men and women who have walked with the Lord and my heart is to be faithful all the way to the finish line.

We've just come through an Olympic period, and that's always fun to see the competition and the training and the preparation and then the rewarding for those whose efforts have paid off by winning the race. I

was thinking this week back to the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, Korea, where you may remember Ben Johnson, who was a Canadian sprinter, became a national Canadian hero and world hero overnight when he set a new world record and won the gold medal in the 100-meter race. And the Canadian Parliament was proclaiming him as the fastest man in the world and all the accolades and all the cheering, the honor for his country.

But within 24 hours, he'd had to hand that gold medal back to the Olympic Committee because he tested positive for steroids. The ironic thing was, just shortly before those Olympics, he had been used as a poster boy in Canada for a say-no-to-drugs campaign. He ran.

It appeared that he won, only to be stripped of the medal, to be disqualified. I have to tell you that I love ministry. Since I was a very little girl, I was saved at the age of four, and that's my first memory is trusting Christ.

And by the time I was probably six or seven years old, I knew in my heart that God had set me apart for the ministry of the gospel, for the kingdom of Christ. I didn't know all of what that would mean. I still don't know all of what that will mean.

But there was an unmistakable, clear call of God on my life from the time I was a little girl, a call to ministry. And I have been blessed over nearly 25 years now to have that call be in vocational Christian service. I thank the Lord for the privilege of ministry, for taking how God speaks to you through his word, and then, if we're open and willing, makes us broken bread and poured out wine to be used to minister, to incarnate and to minister the truth to other lives.

That incredible divine transaction from God to our hearts into the hearts of others is something that is awesome to me. It's a wonder. And I'll tell you this, too.

I love having the Lord as my master. What an incredible Lord he is. I love serving him.

I love ministry. But I've also been in ministry long enough to know that there are a lot who don't finish well. I don't want to speculate as to what percentage, whether it's most or not, but I've seen so many already in my relatively few years come up like a rocket, down like a rock.

Some of them, it's more a subtle, casual burnout or drifting away from the passion and the early fervency of heart they had for the Lord. But so few, as I've watched, really finish well. And that's why I love being around men like Mark Bubeck and others who are represented here who have run well and are continuing to run well in the latter chapters of their lives.

But as I've pondered the day when I will stand before the Lord and the fire will be applied to my acts of service, I just have such a longing to know that I won't be disqualified and that the works will endure the test of his countenance, of his glory, of his word. You know, it's one thing to have impressive and lauded ministry here. It's another thing to have the one who searches and knows our hearts say, well done, good and faithful servant.

And I have found myself at points in ministry very aware, many, many points, of my own weakness and proclivity to wander, the vulnerability of my own flesh. You know, when you're doing conference ministry, writing books, and people are buying those books and being blessed by them. You're on the radio and people are coming and telling you how God's used the ministry in their lives.

Those people who don't know you don't know the battles of your own heart. They don't know the battles that you go through with your own flesh. And someone said to me just a little bit ago, how do you deal with spiritual attack in your life? Have you just come to the place where you're so close to God that Satan leaves you alone? Boy, I'd love to be there.

But you know that the more God's using you and the closer you're walking to the Lord and the more you're dealing with these powerful truths that set people free, the bigger a target you become. And so I have, over the years, pondered a lot about how do you finish well and what are some of the potential pitfalls in running this race of ministry. Now when I say ministry, I'm not just speaking of those of us who are blessed to be able to serve the Lord vocationally.

There are those here who are in that category. But we're all ministers of Christ and servants of the Lord. And God has given to all of us in different ways opportunities to serve him.

And the cry of our hearts is, Lord, we want to be faithful all the way to the finish line. And I have tried to seek out, just out of my own walk with the Lord and watching the lives of others, what are some of the pitfalls, some of the potential pitfalls, that servants of the Lord fall into that end up at times disqualifying them. And I want to share with you today ten of those pitfalls.

And I've probably, there are many others that we could have listed. I've perhaps chosen these because these are the ones that I feel the most vulnerable to. Ten years from now I'll perhaps have different ones on this list.

But as I look back over recent years of ministry in my own life, and a period of time now in the last couple of years of the Lord just exponentially expanding the opportunities for ministry that he's given to me, these are the traps that I feel most vulnerable to. And I would ask that we could just take a moment now and pray, because as I say these things I recognize that I become more accountable and perhaps even more vulnerable to the attacks of the evil ones. So I come and ask you to join me that we come under the covering and the protection of the name of Christ.

And, O Father, how we do exalt your great name. And I do come in weakness and in fear and in trembling, knowing that these men and women cannot possibly see into my heart as you do. And, Lord, we come to you together as learners to sit at your feet and to say, would you spread the corner of your garment over us because you are our nearest kinsman.

Cover us, Lord. Lord, your word says you have covered my head in the day of battle. I think of the song of the hymn writer who said, cover my defenseless head with the shadow of your wing.

Lord, we are defenseless apart from you. But when we come under your covering, we are protected, we are safe. And so we come and take our place under the great name of Jesus.

And I pray now that the words of my mouth, and even more importantly, the meditations of my heart, might they be acceptable in your sight. O Lord, my strength and our great Redeemer. For Jesus' sake I pray it.

Amen. Potential pitfalls of ministry. The first that comes to mind, and I think the one that I face virtually every day, is the danger of losing the wonder.

Losing the wonder. The wonder of what it means to be a child of God. The wonder of the great doctrines and truths of our faith.

The great theological truths. I have known the Lord since I was a child, and have never known anything but to be exposed to the word and the ways of God. We grew up in a home with no television and lots of scripture.

And I thank the Lord for that. But one of the dangers for those of us who have been around the things of God for a long time is that we so easily lose the wonder. I find myself, to tell you the truth, some days in my quiet time and in the word, or listening to the word being read or proclaimed, and it scares me to see that sometimes I have these kind of glazed-over eyes.

Or worse, a glazed-over heart. That no longer is thrilled and awestruck with the wonder of what it is that we have in Christ, the living word, and in the written word of God. Losing the wonder of who we serve, and of what we've been called to do, and of the message that's been entrusted to us.

Losing the wonder of the fruit of the ministry. I get letters and emails and phone calls, and got a sweet note, a card handed to me last night from a woman who's here, what an encouragement, telling how God had been working in her life and in some other women. I just was talking with another woman here who was sharing with me an exciting story of what God is doing in a group in her area through some of the truths that we've been sharing.

But, you know, you hear the fruit of the ministry. You see people being delivered from the clutches of the evil one, and transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. And the danger is that the extraordinary, the supernatural, would become commonplace.

One more person changed, one more marriage salvaged, you know, and that some of us are blessed to see the hand of God active and at work in changing lives. But it's easy to lose the wonder, the sense of the miraculous, that it's God that is at work. This isn't my program, or my book, or my teaching.

This is the power of the Spirit of God. And it's easy to lose the wonder. Heaven doesn't ever lose the wonder.

Heaven rejoices every time a sinner is converted, or a sinner repents. But it's easy to start to have dry eyes, rather than moist eyes. My dad was a man, now he's been with the Lord for over 22 years, but he never lost the wonder of what it meant that God would have saved him, first of all.

He was a wayward, rebellious young man in his mid-twenties. He came into the preaching of the gospel, he was converted, and he never got over the wonder of the fact that God would save him, much less use him. And my dad was not a particularly emotional man, but when he would talk about his conversion story, you could expect that there would be big tears in his eyes.

He kept the tears. He kept the sense of wonder. You know, it's been said that familiarity breeds contempt.

That may be true for some, but I think for me the greater danger is that familiarity would breed complacency, neglect, losing the wonder. And the danger here is that then ministry becomes a job. It's work we do, rather than a passion for a person, the person of Christ.

We get to the place where we're just doing the mechanics. And the challenge for me is where I'm dealing with some of these same truths over and over and over again. The message on brokenness that Dan referred to a few moments ago, the first time I ever gave that message, it was really fresh on my heart.

God was birthing it in me. It's something he was doing in me. And the first time I ever gave that message, it was out of the overflow of a work of God's grace in my own life.

The word had just been penetrating and piercing my heart on some of these issues. Well, now I've given that message many times. And the danger I face is that this precious, priceless truth of brokenness, and presenting that truth, or the steps to freedom in Christ, or the wonderful truths that we traffic in day after day, that we would start to just go on to autopilot.

Going through the motions, we're walking one more person through to freedom in Christ. And that we would lose the sense of passion for the person of Christ. You know, the Apostle Paul was another man who never lost the wonder.

He talks in 1 Timothy chapter 1 about the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. Late in his ministry life, he's still calling it the glorious gospel of the blessed God. It's one of the things I love about Dr. Bubik.

There's a sense of fresh wonder in the heart of that man who's walked with the Lord over so many years. And then Paul says, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. He never lost the sense of the wonder of the gospel, of the wonder of who God is, and of the wonder of being set apart for the ministry of the gospel.

Now on your notes there, I've listed several questions next to each of these points. And I would just encourage you, as I find myself needing to do on a regular basis, to let the Lord search my heart with these kinds of questions. So ask yourself, do I have a genuine passion for Christ and for ministry? Or have I lost the wonder of my relationship with Christ and of the call to ministry? Am I just going through the motions? And I'm going to ask, as we come to the close of this session, that we would take a few moments to just be honest with God about whatever it is that he's shown us, about the pitfalls that we may be in or perilously close to.

As I found myself realizing as I was walking through these notes last night, I found myself believing that God had this message more for me, perhaps, than for anyone else here. Because as a result of some of the ministry challenges I faced in recent months, I had to acknowledge as I was walking through these, there's some of these that I am right at the edge of this pitfall. Thank God for grace.

Thank God for the power of the Spirit that pulls us back and opens our eyes, we've got to be willing to ask ourselves the tough questions and let God, by his Spirit, search our hearts. The second pitfall, and I guess I'd put it right up with the first, is neglecting our personal relationship with the Lord. Neglecting our personal relationship with the Lord.

There's that passage in the first chapter of the Song of Solomon, where the bride says to her bridegroom, I have tended the vineyards of others, but mine own vineyard have I not kept. And I suppose that phrase, as much as almost any single phrase in scripture describes where I so often find myself, in ministering to the needs of others, tending the vineyard of others, but neglecting my own personal vineyard. My own personal relationship with the Lord.

And when my vineyard goes into a state of disrepair, sooner or later I will have nothing left with which to tend the vineyards of others. We're talking here about a failure to maintain and cultivate and prioritize our own personal walk with the Lord. I want for ministry to be the overflow of a heart and a life and a passion

and a walk with God that is genuine and real and fresh.

And so often I find myself instead taking shortcuts. And I'll tell you, the temptation for me to do that has increased many fold over the last year. As I'm now responsible, I used to come up with three, maybe four new messages a year.

I can't imagine how these pastors do new messages week after week. I just am not wired that way. And I'm so thankful for those who are.

But now we're talking about doing 260 radio programs a year. And that's a quantum leap. Not only in volume of work, but harder than that in keeping my life up to date with what I'm communicating to women.

With the truths that I'm proclaiming. And so I've found myself so tempted and at times falling prey to the temptation to take shortcuts. Take shortcuts in the preparation of my heart, the preparation of my life, in the prayer, in the using yesterday's, trusting yesterday's manna to be something that I can provide to feed others today.

Living on yesterday's experiences without God. Yesterday's experiences with God. And then the danger here is in relation to my own vineyard of serving the Lord apart from devotion to Christ.

And isn't that what we see in Luke chapter 10 with Mary and Martha? There's Martha serving Christ. But having neglected devotion for Christ. Robert Murray McShane said, No amount of activity in the king's service will make up for neglect of the king himself.

And I find it's increasingly necessary the more demands are on me. And if God's using you, if you're being effective at counseling, at ministering to others, the demand is going to increase. Because the need is so great out there.

When people find out that you know how to point people to the scripture, the phone's going to be ringing off the hook, the people will be lined up, the demand will increase. And the more the demand increases, the more I find I have got to find ways to pull away. To get rid of the clutter.

To get rid of the noise. To be quiet. So that I can tend my vineyard with God.

One of the most important and valuable decisions the Lord led me to several years ago. I had no idea where the Lord was taking my ministry. But the Lord knew and he protected me with this decision.

And that is that I don't ever, virtually, ever watch television when I'm by myself. And maybe you can handle that. I can't.

I found out that my spiritual passion for the Lord was being sapped. I was tired and I would find myself just even seeing in sort of things. But being spiritually drained when I needed to be spiritually replenished.

And so making the decision that, and I can say with very few exceptions over these last several years. I just, I can't tell you how many times I've come back to a hotel room after a conference like this. And found that decision to leave the room quiet.

Has been such a protection for my own heart. And provided a context, a climate in which I can really nurture my relationship with the Lord. So ask yourself, do I have a vital, growing, intimate love relationship with the Lord Jesus? And am I nurturing, cultivating my vineyard through daily time in his presence.

In the word and in prayer. And then pitfall number three, proclaiming truth we're not living. Proclaiming truth that we're not living.

You've heard it said perhaps that lawyers are the last one to get a will. And physicians are often the last ones to get a checkup or to go to the doctor. Could it be that those of us who are in the ministry of counseling others.

And pointing them to the truth of Christ and to see their spiritual need. That we may be the last ones to realize that we have a spiritual need. A.W. Tozer said that one of the greatest curses of our day.

He said it of his day. I think it's even more true of our day perhaps. Is that we think that because we know something theologically.

Therefore we have that truth. When in fact it's possible that nothing may be further from the truth. Walking further down the road.

Talking further down the road than we're actually walking. Preaching something we're not living. The sin of pretense.

And I have found, I want to be very honest with you here. And just tell you that I have learned that I can perform. And whether I'm living it or not.

I can speak it in a way that will bring some sort of visible results. And God has given to many of you in this room natural gifts and abilities. And for those of us who have been given by God.

Resources and background and training and abilities. There's such a constant danger. That we would be saying things that we're not living.

I did two days of radio recording this week. Did a ten day, two week series on proverbs and the tongue. And I have found myself since Tuesday, since doing that session.

Saying things that I know are not consistent with what I just proclaimed to others. Now, the tragedy is not that so much as if I go on that way. And I fail to let the light search my heart.

And to stop and humble myself and repent. Seek God's forgiveness and recognize my need. I want to walk in the truth of the light that I've seen and that I'm presenting to others.

The apostle Paul talks in Romans chapter 2 about the power of a life message. For better or for worse. The impact of who we are.

Not just what we say. And he talks in verse 21 of Romans 2 about the danger of justifying what we might consider small compromises. And I'm convinced that the burnout and the failure in the Christian life and in ministry is not usually the major blowout.

It's the incremental compromises that we justify. We're tired, we're busy, we're blessed, we're doing the Lord's work. And those incremental compromises.

And Paul talks about this. He says, you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written,

God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. Phew.

What an indictment. It's not just my message. The question is, does my life incarnate my message? And if not, then I will cause the name of God to be blasphemed.

So the great truths that we preach to others of holiness and prayer and repentance and forgiveness and humility. Do I have a life message in those truths? Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. He didn't say, follow my syllabus, listen to my tapes, read my books.

He said, follow my life as I follow Christ. And I'm convinced it's not just the public life, it's the private life. It's the times, the obscure moments and being single and living alone.

I guess I'm even more conscious of this because when you're married, there's something of a mirror person in your life to show you how you're coming across and provide accountability. And I was so struck by what Dr. Anderson said a little while ago about the danger of becoming autonomous, independent. But it's so easy in our private moments to justify.

I'm not talking about egregious sins. That's probably not where it starts. But to justify small compromises, small failures.

And I'm convinced that ultimately that is what is going to show up in the public life. It's those potholes, those sinkholes in the road that ultimately cave in. And when what was underneath wasn't solid, then ultimately the result is going to be seen on the surface.

Oswald Chambers says, the message must be part of ourselves. Our lives must be the sacrament of our message. Before God's message can liberate other souls, he said, the liberation must be real in you.

In Romania under communism prior to 1989, believers of all denominations were called repenters. It was a term of derision initially as I understand it. They're the repenters.

Wouldn't it be incredible if believers were known as repenters in our day? But there were issues. There were issues within the life of the church under one of the most oppressive communist regimes under Ceausescu there in the 70s and 80s. And one courageous pastor in Oradea went to his people at one point and he said, it's time for the repenters to repent.

And he brought to the surface and exposed two particular issues that if I took time to tell you right now what they are, we in our Western way of thinking would say, those are so picky. Big deal. He said, it is a big deal.

And we need to repent. That was in the early 70s. The repenters did repent.

And God sent out of that church as a spark what became a great fire of revival. And I believe ultimately was what led to the overthrow of the communist regime in that country when the repenters said, we want to have a life that's consistent with our message. So I encourage you to ask yourself as I ask myself, is there any issue that God has revealed in his word that I'm not obeying? Am I living, am I walking as a repenters? Not just did I repent in the past, but am I living and walking today as a repenters? Is my private lifestyle consistent with that which I proclaim to others? And could I say to those who follow me, live your life just as I do, and God will bless you.

Here's a fourth potential pitfall, and that is relying on the natural. Relying on the natural rather than the supernatural. And in two particular areas this is of concern to me.

Number one is relying on my natural gifts and abilities. Relying on natural gifts and abilities. Coming to the place where we're no longer dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Where we can counsel, we can teach, we can do, we can come up with messages, we can develop material, but we don't have a consciousness of our dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit. We get to the place where we can do ministry without God. Some years ago I found myself asking the Lord to never let me get to the place where ministry, developing and presenting His truth, would be easy for me.

You know that's one prayer that has been very faithful to answer. And as much as I kick and scream and resist the pressure at times and the demands and the difficulties, I'm so thankful that God keeps me in a place where I just believe that I can't do it without Him. The time we know we're close to this pitfall is when we become prayerless.

Prayerlessness is an evidence that I'm thinking I can manage without God, and then minister becomes the sum total of my combined efforts and abilities. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2, When I came to you, brethren, it was not with excellency of speech or of wisdom. I declared unto you the testimony of God, for I determined to know nothing among you save Christ and Him crucified.

I came to you with weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit of God and of power. So that your faith would not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. Some of you are familiar with the name William Gurnall, who was a 17th century Puritan pastor.

A lot of wisdom and insight that God gave to this man through his word. And William Gurnall said, If there is any human explanation for our Christian service, then however impressive our work may appear in the eyes of men, it will be burnt up in the day of testing as wood, hay, and straw. The only work that will abide for eternity is that which is produced in humble dependence upon the power of God's Holy Spirit.

And then the danger of relying on our natural tools and resources and programs. I find myself, you know, sometimes in counseling situations now, just wanting to apply a book to someone's life. Buy this book, listen to this tape, watch this video, go to this conference.

I'm not saying that those tools aren't valuable, but those tools in and of themselves have no power to change lives. Apart from the Spirit of God. I think of that passage in 2 Kings chapter 4, where the woman's son had died and she went to Elisha and begged him to help her.

And Elisha sent his servant Gehazi on ahead and said, Take my staff, take my rod, and go into the child. Now why Elisha did it this way, I don't know, but I can just imagine Gehazi as he's on his way running ahead of Elisha thinking, Boy, I've got it now. I've got Elisha's rod.

I've got his staff. And I don't know how it works, but every time he uses this thing, miracles happen. Now I'm going to see the miracle happen.

And he goes in and he lays that staff on that lifeless body. And what happens? Absolutely nothing. It's just a staff.

There's no power in the staff. There's no power in that, whatever tapes are made of, and paper and pulp and ink. There's no power in those.

And then Elisha comes in. And he prays. Cries out to God.

And then he lays himself on that lifeless body. I mean head-to-head, body-to-body, arm-to-arm, leg-to-leg, and he breathes. The power of God's Spirit breathes through the servant of God and breathes life into that child.

It's life-to-life is what ministry is about. Not dependence upon our tools, our resources, our programs, but pouring out our lives on behalf of others. And so Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2, We loved you so much that we shared with you not only the gospel, but our very lives as well.

Laying down our lives. You've perhaps heard the story of the Chinese pastor who had suffered much for his faith. He came to the United States and was asked by Larry Burkett what was the thing that most surprised him about Christianity in the West as he had seen it.

That Chinese pastor said, What amazes me most about Western Christianity is how much you're able to accomplish without God. Well, maybe it appears that way. But when the true story is told in eternity, we're going to find that whatever was done without God was not truly powerful or effective.

And so we ask ourselves, How does my life evidence a dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit? And what is there about my life and ministry that can't be explained apart from God? Am I allowing God to stretch me, to push me out of the comfort zone of what I think I can handle, getting out of the realm of the natural? Am I laying down my life for people, or am I just applying principles and programs to their problems? Pitfall number five, leaving the pathway of humility. Leaving the pathway of humility. Pride.

The danger of becoming self-absorbed, self-centered, enamored with ourselves. Coming to the place where we're no longer little in our own eyes. Start to read our own press reports, and worse yet, we start to believe them, or worse yet, we start to write them.

I know how God has exposed some of this junk in my own heart in the last several years. And I found myself at points having given this message on brokenness and humility, and then God took the message and exploded it into the hearts of people around the world. When I gave that message, I knew how little I had to do with it.

The point came when I found myself really relishing the popularity, seeing my name in print. And I had to take some, what for me was pretty major steps to let God put the axe to the root of the pride that was choking out the life of Christ in my own spirit. And it's not a once-for-all thing.

It's a daily matter, the challenge of leaving the pathway of humility. We become proud of what we know, proud of what we've done, proud of our reputation as an individual or as a ministry, no longer surprised that God would use us, and blind to our own needs. Coming to the place where we don't any longer have a teachable spirit.

Again, I just want to reference back to what Dr. Anderson said. I was so touched by the fact that he was able to have a spirit that wasn't defensive when he was criticized. And as he was telling those stories, I could just feel my own blood pressure going up on his behalf.

And I thought, if I were the person in that situation, I don't think I could have responded the way that he was demonstrating for us. But I need to learn how to. And the humble in spirit can respond in a way that is not defensive when criticized.

There's that danger of professionalism. And the larger our ministry becomes, the better known we are, the more established we are, the greater the tendency to protect our image, our reputation. And it becomes more difficult for us to be transparent and honest.

We've got more to lose. It's tougher for us to share our needs with others. And that's why I really try hard, probably not hard enough, to keep asking people of God around me for input for my life.

The founder of our ministry, before he went to be with the Lord, used to say, the last man to know he's got a rip in his jacket is the guy who's got it on. So we've just got to assume that we've got blind spots, things we can't see. And it's so important.

It's more important for me now than ever to, on a regular basis, go to the people who know me best, who really know me, not the people who read my books and write nice notes, but the people who work with me, and to ask, what am I blind to? What are you seeing that I'm not seeing? To keep a teachable spirit. Again, let me quote William Gernal here. He said, knowing your strength lies wholly in God and not in yourself, remain humble.

Even when God is blessing and using you most. God's favor is neither the work of your own hands nor the price of your own worth. How can you boast of what you did not buy? If you embezzle God's strength and credit it to your own account, he will soon call an audit and take back what was his, Allah.

So we ask ourselves, am I walking in humility? Do I have a teachable spirit? Have I kept a servant's heart? I have a pastor friend who says, every problem can be solved if people have a servant's heart. Keeping a servant's heart. Do I esteem all others as better than myself? And am I amazed that God would use me? Pitfall number six, failing to resolve conflicts biblically.

Failing to resolve conflicts biblically. I won't say much about this, except I think we all know, for those of us who are serving in the context of a corporate setting, a local church staff, a parachurch ministry, a counseling center, one of the greatest threats to the glory of God and that ministry continuing to please the Lord is when we fail to resolve conflicts biblically. We will have the differences.

We will have the places where we offend each other and we sin against each other. That's going to happen. The question is, how do we resolve those issues? Do we resolve them biblically or do we resolve them in the way that comes most naturally for us? That means we've got to have an unswerving commitment to the principles of God's word.

If your brother sins against you, go to him, not to someone else. Go to him. We need to be loyal to each other in the body of Christ.

I served in a volunteer capacity on the staff of a church years ago when I was a college student. I remember the staff of that church had a commitment to speak well of each other and they practiced this. If somebody would call one of those staff members and start to talk about a concern they had about another one, the staff member who was hearing it would say, I know that that person would want to know what you're saying.

Do you want to pick up the phone and call him or do you want me to? Go to the person. If you see a brother who's taken an offense, who's stumbled, you who are spiritual, get the beam out of your own eye first and then when you can see, go and help restore that person in a spirit of meekness. But go to the person.

Send people back to the source. And so we ask ourselves, is my conscience clear with every person? With the people I serve with, is my conscience clear with every member of my family? Is my conscience clear with everyone? And is there anyone that I know has something against me that I haven't gone to? Is there anyone who's sinned against me that I haven't gone to them in the spirit of scripture and sought to restore them? Number seven, the danger of settling for the status quo. Settling for the status quo.

Coming to the place where we walk by sight rather than by faith. Resting on our laurels. No longer exercising faith.

Content to keep the machinery going. But not stepping out and letting God push us out into whole new areas of fruitfulness. Now when I was 20 years old, I loved walking by faith.

I mean, I just, God had given me a dad who was visionary and who had a heart as big as, well I won't say a heart as big as God, but it sure seemed that way to his daughter. And a man who was a man of faith and I loved walking that way. And maybe I feel this even particularly as a woman.

You men tend to be more conquerors and you like new battles. As a woman, I would like the idea as I get older of just being more behind the scenes. I don't want to get pushed out into new challenges.

The older I've gotten, the less I embrace new challenges. I want to be comfortable. I want to be settled.

And yet God has been so gracious to keep pushing me out to the edge of that land. To keep me in a place where I need Him. I love the story in Joshua chapter 14 of Caleb.

At the age of 85, he's asking for more mountains to conquer. He's saying, God's given me strength and I want to use every ounce of strength I have to serve the Lord, to bring about His glory and His kingdom in this world. Give me another mountain.

Boy, that didn't come naturally to me. But I've asked the Lord if it would please Him to give me till age 85. He may give less, He may give more, but that's my heart's desire.

To serve Him and I want to do it with all my heart, with all my energy and I want to do it by faith. I don't ever want to get to the place, well in my flesh I do, but in my spirit, I don't ever want to get to the place where I can do ministry without God. Where I just settle for the status quo.

Am I exercising faith in the power of God? Am I seeking God for fresh visions and opportunities to glorify Him? And what am I believing God for that only He can do? Ask yourself those questions. Number eight, the pitfall of serving without love. Serving without love.

As we search the scriptures, we find that we have a passionate God. And we find that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our strength, with all our might. So if that's the greatest commandment, what must be the greatest sin? Perhaps to love God with less than all my heart? And in the ministry I find such a danger of serving without love for God.

I'm reminded of that song, to love the Lord our God is the heartbeat of our mission, the spring from which our service overflows. That's what will keep us fresh and green. In old age, being flourishing and bearing fruit, as if we've sustained a growing, passionate love for God.

But not just a love for God, a love for others, a love for each other first. How can we love our clients and our counselees and our people that out in the world that come to us with needs if we can't even love each other? And it's so easy to take each other for granted, to fail to have the kind of love that overlooks one another's weaknesses and seeks to restore one another. But then to have a love for the people that God's called us to minister to.

And maybe nobody else here relates to this, but I have to tell you that this is a growing struggle in my own walk. And that is I find myself having heard so many stories from so many women with so many issues. There are times when I am just so tired, I don't want to hear one more story.

There are times when, you know, it's the woman who says, and I hate to say this because nobody will come talk to me afterwards, but sometimes you can just see it in the eyes. It's the person standing, there's a long line of people, and there's a woman who says, do you have a minute? And you know what's coming. I mean, it's this incredibly convoluted, distressed, perplexing, huge background.

I'm not a counselor. And you know, even if you were, you couldn't solve it in a minute. And my heart at times just wants to, I don't love that woman at some of those moments.

I find myself nodding my head, smiling, saying the right things, but wishing like crazy that she'd go away. I'm embarrassed to tell you that's true. But there are just times when I love ministry, but I don't like people.

What a heart the Savior has. And I get back into the Gospels, and I say, Lord, give me the heart of Jesus to love the people that you've called me to serve. If I love audiences, but I don't love people, then I'm at a pitfall.

And I'm setting myself up, I believe, for it not to finish well. Is your service motivated by genuine love for God and for others? And I pray, oh Lord, give me a heart of compassion. And then number nine, losing perspective.

Losing perspective. Losing sight of the big picture. And it's so easy to do.

I find I do this in two ways. First of all, I forget how big God is. That's a way we can lose perspective.

We forget how big God is, and ultimately that leads to discouragement. We lose heart. We fail.

We faint. Because we forget how big God is. And we get into this spiritual battle.

And we start to feel overwhelmed. The enemy is so strong. The opposition is so great.

And if we keep our eyes down here on this playing field, that's the way we're going to feel much of the time. And that's why I love that passage in 2 Kings 6. Remember how the Syrian army surrounded Elisha's house during the night with their chariots and their horses. And the servant woke up in the morning and looked out the window and he saw the enemy.

And he was terrified. Master, what are we going to do? Elisha says, God, open his eyes. Give him perspective.

Help him see the truth. And the servant's eyes were opened and he lifted his eyes up and he saw that on the hills surrounding that home and that city and those servants of the Lord were the chariots of God, the armies of God, hopelessly outnumbering the puny Syrian army. It's amazing what a change in perspective can do.

Forgetting how big God is causes us to become discouraged. When we get discouraged, as I often do, I see the extent to which the enemy has deceived and destroyed and is killing the lives and the marriages of women and their relationships with their children. I hear these stories day in and day out and I start to think, this is hopeless.

And I lift my eyes up and I see a God who's still on his throne, whose throne is established in the heavens, whose kingdom rules over all, who has written the last chapter and we're just waiting for the rest of the world to read it and say amen to it. I lift my eyes up. I say, God, you're so great.

So yes, I'll go out there one more day, get shot at and take it and listen to the stories and love the people and do the work of the ministry because you are big. My heart is encouraged. And here's the other way we lose perspective and that's by forgetting how little we are.

Forgetting how little we are. And there again, we're back to this matter of pride and self-sufficiency. When we forget how little we are, it leads to pride and self-sufficiency.

Remembering that apart from Christ, you and I can do nothing. I remember talking with Margaret Nicole, Dr. Margaret Nicole is a woman who grew up in Bulgaria under the communist regime there. She's a concert violinist and she ultimately was able to escape to the United States and has had a ministry here.

She plays her violin and she says with her very thick Bulgarian accent that starting to take credit for being used of God is a little bit like my violin saying aren't I wonderful? She said it's just a piece of wood until it gets put in the hands of someone who knows how to play it. We are nothing apart from being in Christ and being instruments in his hand, being broken bread in his hands that he can distribute to feed and to minister grace to the world. So Paul says we have this treasure, this surpassing greatness of the life of Christ, this treasure we have it in earthen vessels, cracked pots, so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not of us.

Does your life demonstrate a conviction that God is omnipotent, all powerful, and that God is sovereign? Number 10, the pitfall of seeking comfort and convenience. Seeking comfort and convenience. Especially after years of tenure in serving the Lord, does this become more of a pitfall? At least that's my experience to this point.

The tendency to coast, to feel that we wouldn't say it. I deserve a break today. The danger of growing weary in well doing.

And I find myself there a lot. And that's when again I need to get back to the heart of God. To the calling of God.

To the greatness of the gospel and the greatness of our task and the greatness of his kingdom. And be willing to keep pressing on, not settling into my own comfort and convenience, not riding the spiritual coattails of others. It's easy to become content to be a weak link.

Especially if you're part of a ministry and you're perhaps serving as part of a ministry. And we think, if I make just these small compromises in this area, this won't affect everything and everyone else around me. And we become content to become that weak link.

And then we become careless and we fail to be vigilant. We let our guard down. We fail to be sobered by the reminder of David as a middle aged man.

Having fought so many battles successfully for the Lord and in the strength of the Lord. Staying at the palace at the time when kings go out to war. And as someone has said, it wasn't that the battle needed David, it's that David needed the battle.

You know I don't, traveling lost its glamour for me after about the first three weeks and that was 20 some years ago. I don't like to travel. I don't like, I like being at home.

I like having a nest. I like being secure and comfortable. I want life to be easy.

And God keeps pushing me out into places where I'm not comfortable. Places that require sacrifice. And tears.

And surrender. And God keeps pushing me out. But you know, I believe it's as much for my protection that he does that as for whatever may happen in someone else's life when I'm out on the road ministering.

I've been inspired, as many of you have over the years, by the life of David Livingston, the great missionary statesman of the continent of Africa. And I've prayed numerous times over the years that prayer that he first prayed, Lord, send me anywhere. Only go with me.

Lay any burden on me. Only sustain me. And sever every tie but the tie that binds me to thy service and to thy heart.

If the ministry where you serve, if your family, if your church, if your counseling center, were no more virile than your walk with God, what would be the condition of that ministry? What would be the condition of your home? Of your church? Are you self-seeking or self-denying? And have you surrendered all your rights to yourself? To your personal desires, comfort, and convenience? Let us press on in patient self-denial. Accept the hardship. Shrink not from the loss.

Our portion lies beyond the hour of trial. Our crown beyond the cross. And as Amy Carmichael prayed, from subtle love of softening things, from easy choices, weakenings, from all that dims thy calvary, O Lamb of God, deliver me.

When the slothful flesh would murmur, ease would cast her spell, set our face as flint till twilight's vest propel, on thy brow we see a thorn crow, blood tracks, blood drops in thy track, O forbid that we should ever turn us back. Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, and in other places as well, that ministry is an awesome stewardship. It's a great privilege, but it's an enormous responsibility.

Those of us who teach others are more accountable, because our role is so determinative. We produce after our own kind, and we have to live with what we produce. Paul says that we are to serve as those who will give account.

Not only will we give account for all the visible results that others have seen and applauded, but we'll give account for our motives, why we did what we did, and for our faithfulness. When unapplauded, when

criticized, when tired, when hurt, did we stay faithful? So I encourage you, as God is speaking to me, my heart these days, serve as those who will give account, and then serve as those who will also receive a reward. Maybe not here, maybe not now, but for sure, then and there.

Would you bow with me in prayer? I wonder if before we break for lunch, and begin to fellowship with one another, if we could take just a few moments here to be quiet in the presence of God, and to agree with Him about whatever He has said to us in these last moments. You may want that sheet in front of you, some of those questions. Where did the Spirit of God point His finger in your heart? Would you be honest with Him, and say, Lord, that's where I am right now.

I'm in that pitfall. Or, I'm perilously close to it. Would you cry out to the Lord in these moments, and just be honest with Him, and then cry out to Him for grace? And I'll close in just a few moments.

How many of you would be honest enough to say that God has spoken to your heart, and shown you that there are one or more of these areas, or perhaps something entirely different that's another pitfall that He's brought to your attention over this last hour, and you've agreed with Him that that's where you are? You're trusting His grace to restore your heart, your life in that area. If that's true of you, would you just slip your hand up in the air before the Lord, and say, God's spoken to me in that way. Just up and then down.

Oh, thank you, Lord. Thank you, thank you. I know you've spoken to my heart about my need for a fresh sense of the wonder, about some of the shortcuts that I've let the busyness push me into.

About my need for a fresh infusion of your love. Lord, how I pray for these precious fellow servants, and for myself, that you would keep every single one of us faithful, all the way to the finish line. May there not be one man or woman in this room who doesn't make it to the finish line.

Lord, we know that apart from your faithfulness, that prayer cannot be answered. It's not our faithfulness. It's not our holding on to you.

It's your faithfulness. You're holding on to us. And some of us who are running and look like we're going to win the gold, I pray that you would catch us, stop us, change us before we appear to have that medal and then have to give it back, having been disqualified.

Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and honor and power both now and forever.

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