

Over the past couple of weeks, we have learned to measure success in a better way. Here's a summary of [what we have heard](#) so far:

- Discerning and Adapting vs. Doubling Down
- Leading Paradigmatic Change vs. Reinvigorating Old Programs
- Equipping Others for Ministry vs. Exhausting Yourself in Ministry
- Measuring Actions vs. Counting Outcomes
- Multiple Financial Streams vs. Single Financial Streams

And this week, we focus on the last two of this series:

- Pursuing faithfulness vs. chasing fruitfulness
- Committing to the long haul vs. considering another call when things get difficult

Take up your Cross

In [Matthew 16:24](#), Jesus says, “If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” In 18 words, Jesus helps his audience understand what it means to follow him in this world. Jesus would say that if you want to make much of yourself, exalt yourself, and live for yourself, you cannot follow Him.

We all have a cross to bear. For some, it means sacrificing a lavish career, suffering through physical means, or struggling through a painful life. But ultimately, the cross we bear is worth bearing, because Jesus died and rose to life, so we can have life in his name. Ultimately, our “cross” is what the Bible calls a light, momentary affliction that is “preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison ([2 Cor. 4:17](#)).

Whether you are a Replant Pastor or another ministry leader, each one of us has a cross to bear in ministry itself. Paul says, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” ([2 Cor. 4:11](#)). When Paul said this, he was helping the church in Corinth understand what it was like to do the work of ministry: painful, yet joyful. Every pastor should understand what scripture says about suffering, because many may have the wrong expectations of what ministry may look like.

Pursuing Faithfulness vs. Chasing Fruitfulness

Far too many pastors and leaders have been burned out in ministry, and quit altogether because of burnout, wrong expectations, and unexpected conflict. but there is certainly a better way to

measure success, and it has little to do with the fruit that we produce in our work. It has more to do with our walking in obedience to our calling. We have a tendency to sometimes take matters into our own hands. Like Abraham and Sarah, we want to fulfill God's promises ourselves. The problem is that our way normally results in dissension and destruction. God's way is better.

In a normal career, our performance is evaluated by the work we are able to accomplish. When I was in the landscaping field, my work was evaluated on the efficiency and quality of my work. But ministry should be seen differently. That's because in kingdom work, we are not the ones who give growth to the body, and the business does not belong to us. Our "company" has one founder and one CEO, Jesus Christ. He is the one that gives fruit and gets the glory for any fruit that is produced. Our job is simply to steward and care for what he has entrusted to us.

I was speaking to a friend of mine, who recently entered a new pastoral role. He very quickly told me about some of the stress that he's already experienced in serving, and it had much to do with the attendance of those in that church setting. He already was experiencing the early signs of depression over a lack of attendance. "I'm working hard, studying hard to get up and deliver, and I feel like it's falling on deaf ears, or hardly any ears at all," he said. Do you feel the same way?

One thing that's important to remember and understand is that we are limited in what we can do. The past twenty years have seen a plethora of church growth strategies and movements. Some of them, unfortunately, are void of the power of the Holy Spirit. Only God can bring life to a dying church. No one can or has risen from the dead apart from the work of God. So, we need Him to work in our dying churches again. Our role is simply to be faithful to God's calling in our lives.

Committing to the Long Haul

Replant Pastors all over our nation are working hard, serving faithfully in their roles. Depending on the dynamic, some of them are still in a plowing stage, preparing the ground. Some of them are tilling the soil, and some are planting seeds. In my role at the Association, I have talked to a few of our pastors who are struggling with the difficulty of seeing little fruit. Some of them have considered being called elsewhere, or leaving the ministry altogether.

But we cannot call ourselves somewhere else, and force God's hand. Like Jonah, we may try to run in a different direction, but God will have his way. Like Jonah, God will either convict us of our disobedience, or remind us of our calling and place us where He wants us. Like Jonah, you may find yourself in a variety of situations, from the belly of a whale, to a seat under the hot sun because of a hungry caterpillar. We can choose to either remain under God's calling and be content, or be miserable in our disobedience.

I want to encourage Replant Pastors to commit to the long haul. In conversations with pastors, some are frustrated in trying to enact change. But sometimes it takes difficult work and time to build trust. There is ebb and flow in a church's willingness to get behind your leadership, so trust

building is important. It does help to remember Paul's words in Colossians 1:10. Paul says, "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;"

"Wait, I thought you said not to focus on fruitfulness!" Notice what Paul is saying, because there is an important sequence of events. He is saying, "First, walk worthy of the Lord. Obey Him. Serve Him. As a result, you will bear fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God."

Is the Grass Greener?

God may do something in you, on you, and around you before he does something through you. We should not be surprised when there are fiery trials, when there is persecution, when there is hardships. Any pastor who wants to bypass difficulty should reconsider the ministry. God often brings us through hardship to produce something in us. So I would encourage any pastor or leader to have a well-developed understanding of suffering, especially in the life of a minister.

When we read through the persecution of the early church and the hardships of Paul and his fellow workers, it gives us a calm assurance to make it through difficult business meetings and disputed financial decisions. While the thorn in your flesh may not be the building and grounds committee, one thing should be remembered: Hardship is natural for anyone in ministry. Rest assured, you're not alone.

The grass may be greener on another side, but that grass withers as well. If things get tough, don't begin looking at the job board so quickly. Instead, get on your knees before God and began seeking Him. If He called us, He will sustain us. Let us look to Him.

For resources listed in this week's podcast, see the following: [The Insanity of God](#), [The Insanity of Obedience](#), [The Cost of Discipleship](#), [This, Too Shall Last](#). See our other blogs [here](#). Please reach out to us for any feedback, and let us know how we can help.