

HOW TO SURVIVE THE DOG DAYS OF AUGUST

In Nehemiah 4- it tells us that half way through the project of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, the people began to get tired, disillusioned, and discouraged. Fatigue at the *half way* point is very common.

I've noticed that about half way through the year I always tend to get a little lethargic and down. Part of it is the warm weather. Part of it is everyone is on vacation. Part of it is just the normal letdown after the Springtime push.

This has been a tough year.: The economy has stalled, stocks have tanked, we have an energy crisis. And our church is in a transition year. So today, I like to share six things I remind myself of when I start to lose motivation.

WHAT I REMEMBER WHEN I'M FEELING DOWN

1. REMEMBER THAT FEELINGS ARE UNRELIABLE

"Like an open city with no defenses is the man with no check on his feelings." Pr.25:28 [NAB]

"Trust wholeheartedly in God; put no faith in your own perception." Pr. 3:5 [NJB]

Feelings comes from a variety of sources: past, present, & future.
Feelings often lie. They are not always reality.

The Bible says life is a mixture of conflicting emotions.
"Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief." Prov. 14:13 [NIV]

Life is complex and we must often live with mixed feelings.
We must constantly manage alternating emotions. Often a roller coaster.

People often compare life to a roller-coaster of hills and valleys. But actually life more like 2 rails on a railroad track. One rail represents the good and positive in your life. The other represents the bad and painful in your life. *You will always have both at the same time!*

There is something good & something bad happening all the time. Life is not a matter of everything being good for one month and then everything being bad the next month. It is always a mixture of both.

Life is a blend of both bitter and sweet. What I focus on is my choice.
In ministry we must *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."* Romans 12:15

Warning: Don't project your feelings on everyone else!

When I'm unsettled - I tend to think everyone else is unsettled. When I am discouraged, or anxious, or experiencing low morale, I tend to think everyone else feels the same way. They don't!

If you're feeling low, you might just need some rest!

2. REMEMBER THAT LIFE IS A SERIES OF OPPOSITE ACTIONS

"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven... A time to plant and a time to uproot... A time to tear down and a time to rebuild... A time to keep and a time to throw away..." Eccl. 3:1-6

We love the times of planting, but rarely love the times of uprooting. We like to rebuild, but we disdain the times of tearing down. But life involves both!

This year at Saddleback has been a year of waiting and pruning and consolidation in preparation for next year's growth when our 3 new Children's buildings open. It hasn't been as exciting as an expansion year but it has been just as necessary for our church's health.

3. REMEMBER THAT DRY SPELLS ARE TIME TO BUILD CHARACTER

"Do not harden your hearts... during the time of testing in the desert." Hebrews 3:8 [NIV]

4. REMEMBER WHO I AM SERVING.

"Don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ." Col. 3:22-24 [Msg]

Paul was crystal clear in his motivation for ministry: I do it for Jesus' sake!

You must continually ask *"WHY am I doing this?"* The WHY always determines HOW LONG. Your persistence is always determined by your perspective.

IF YOU ASKED PAUL: WHY DID YOU..

- ...travel by foot to all those places?
- ...put up with jail, beatings, stonings, & shipwrecks?
- ...go without food & sleep & comfort & safety?
- ...never give up? He'd say *"FOR JESUS SAKE!"*

If you are living for the *approval of others*, there are a lot easier ways to get that than in ministry!

Live for an audience of one! Make your goal to hear Jesus say *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"*

5. REMEMBER THE ETERNAL DIFFERENCE YOUR MINISTRY IS MAKING.

"All this is for (their) benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God." . 2 Cor. 4:15 [NIV]

Paul said, I keep on going because I know its helping others! I serve for the benefit of others – that they may know Christ.

Why do we keep on reaching out and growing at Saddleback? Don't we have enough people already? We don't keep growing for *our* benefit! We keep reaching out because everyone needs Jesus! As long as one person in our area doesn't know Christ we *must* keep reaching out!

If you don't love people you'll never last in ministry. I may preach, teach, lead, and counsel...*but if I have not love...* it doesn't count for anything.

6. REMEMBER OUR ETERNAL REWARDS.

"For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever." 2 Cor. 4:17-18 [NLT]

"These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us." 2 Cor. 4:17 [Msg]

The final secret of staying power is to focus on our future with Christ.
The most powerful motivation is neither *internal*, nor *external* – but *eternal!*

Paul endured incredible problems in his ministry (2 Cor 11:-23- 28) but he called them *"these light & momentary troubles"*! That's because he had an eternal perspective!

Heb.12:1 tells us *"Jesus endured the cross by looking forward to joy..."* You must look past your problems to the reward! Someone has said, *"Only he who sees the invisible can accomplish the impossible."*

Ministry is a marathon, not a 50 yr dash. And I've noticed that the crowd thins out as the race progresses. But it is not how you *start* race that matters, but how you finish it.

"Since God in his mercy has given us this wonderful ministry, we never give up." 2 Cor. 4:1[NLT]

Never forget that everything God does for you, in you, and through you – he does by grace. Remind yourself daily of this fact. We are all trophies of grace.

There are 2 benefits of grace:

1. I don't have to prove my worth.
You are freed from the performance trap (with is a root of workaholism)
Your worth is not based on your word.

2. I don't have to have to wallow in my failures
All of us have failures in ministry.
But you don't have to get down or depressed over them.
Grace gives you power to start over!

So never give up.