

“How to Deal with Apathy In Ministry”

Apathy = The inability to feel or have passion.

Just defining the word creates frustration with those of us who are passionate about ministry and our relationship with Christ. Too often we feel like we are living in the land of Laodicea where people are not “hot or cold.” Their lukewarm commitment to anything related to faith in Christ is enough to cause the most gifted servant hang up their robe and towel and do something else.

Unfortunately, the task of leadership is to motivate, admonish and encourage apathetic people to begin pursuing their faith and service with great passion. I think it was President Eisenhower who said,

“Leadership is getting people to do things they don’t want to do.”

So, a few thoughts about how to deal with constant apathy in ministry...

1. Know that few will ever be as committed as you are.

It’s important to realize they don’t spend the time thinking, dreaming, creating ways in which to reach, disciple, serve or nurture people. Our people spend 40+ hours in an environment with different values than ours, working with people who probably aren’t believers, fulfilling expectations placed upon them. Jesus said that wherever we allow our mind and focus to go, our heart will follow (Matt. 6:21). In other words, we love what we spend our time doing. Typical Christians want to limit their time in matters of faith to just Sunday mornings. It isn’t right, but it is what it is.

2. Resist the temptation to compare your commitment with other’s.

When we are sweating in the trenches of ministry, it’s common to look around to see who else is working just as hard as we are, and in the same way. When we don’t see anyone shoulder-to-shoulder with us, we become resentful, frustrated and angry. That’s when we need to ask, “What’s my motivation?!” Colossians 3:17 says that whatever we do, we need to do “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That means we are serving for Him and no one else. Remember: we, too, have areas of apathy that may differ from those we resent.

3. Make sure we are giving people real ministry.

The greatest cure for apathy is for an individual to sense God is using him/her in a very real, significant way! Are we involving others or hogging the ministry? Are we empowering others with REAL ministry or just giving them menial tasks? Nothing frustrates a volunteer more than when they feel like they are not needed.

Give them:

- Responsibility
- Authority
- Title

When you believe in someone, they will see themselves different. When their perspective of themselves change, so will their behavior. In other words, people will begin to act and behave in a way that reflects what YOU believe about them!!

4. Encourage people to discover and use their spiritual gifts.

Apathy is a sign that a person hasn't found their niche. Everyone is a "10" somewhere, and it's up to us to help them find their niche. Once they do, they begin making investments in it (i.e. training, practice, education, reading, etc.). Our role, according to Ephesians 4:11, is to help them discover what God wants THEM to do, not what WE want them to do. We need to cooperate with God in their lives. When that happens, they take ownership for their future.

5. Move with movers.

Bottom line, after all the teaching, encouraging, and persuading is done, people are going to gravitate to what THEY think is important. If they deem that matters of faith are low on the priority list, MOVE ON!! I know that sounds harsh, but Jesus himself did this many times. When a town was resistant to the Gospel he moved on to the next, often times spending time with the marginalized because of their receptivity. So, we need to do the same. The person we've been pursuing may not be ready to break out of their apathy. However, chances are there are people we haven't noticed who ARE ready to be challenged. We need to learn how to spot fertile ground and workable soil...

How to Spot a Mover:

- Those that are asking questions
- Those that critique or even criticize a ministry
- Those that notice unmet needs

We need to recognize these signs and move with the movers. Since apathy won't go away anytime soon, we can't let it frustrate us to the point of giving up. The prophets of the OT dealt with it, Jesus and the disciples dealt with it, we need to find ways of dealing with it, too. Because when people finally "get it", it's beautiful!!

Romans 12:11 (NIV) ¹¹*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*