

“I can plod.” The man who said those words was William Carey (1761-1834). Perhaps you recognize the name? He is remembered as the father of modern missions, a man who by God's grace pioneered an awakening in the country of India. He faced severe obstacles and devastating setbacks, yet his ministry was used mightily by God. And he could plod. But is plodding—honorable as it sounds—really what we ought to be doing for God? Is it not more honorable to engage in bold advances for the Kingdom? Shouldn't we pray for miracles and expect God to do great things? Why plod? Shouldn't we expect great things from God? Shouldn't we do something more than just plod?

William Carey was obviously a courageous missionary, and by all accounts, a success. But lest we adopt his plodding mantra without careful thought, let's think about some of the negative ramifications of plodding.

### **Perils of Plodding**

- **Plodding can result in discouragement.** The dictionary definition of plodding is “slow-moving and unexciting.” To illustrate, let's say a man is a pastor of a small church. He's a plodder. He's a faithful guy. But as his ministry rolls on, month after month, year after year, he realizes that not a whole lot is happening. Revivals are not forthcoming. Drove of people are not getting saved. In fact, some of the families that he thought he “put back together,” have come totally unglued. The man plods, but discouragement sets in.
- **Plodding can result in burnout.** When a person pours intense labor into something for which they are not gifted, burnout will result. For example, consider a pastor whose gift is Bible exposition. He is not gifted at administration. However, his church of 200 people and lots of programs demands a great deal of administration. Soon, the pastor discovers that the lion's share of his time is consumed by administrative details. Despite his lack of administrative skill, he tries to organize programs and oversee events. He feels like he's banging his head against a wall. And eventually, he gives in. He is exhausted. He is fatigued. He plods. And burns out.
- **Plodding is slower than sprinting.** The term “plodding” doesn't sit well with a type A personality—the kind of person whose calendar is packed with events, whose cell phone rings constantly, whose multi-tasking skills are refined, whose email inbox is always full, whose aspirations are lofty, and whose life speed is always high. Plodding is antithetical to their nature. As they see it, plodding is antithetical to the Christian life, too. Wasn't Jesus

busy? Didn't Paul have a packed itinerary? Didn't the early church have services every single day? Why plod for God, when one can sprint?

- **Plodding can result in ineffectiveness.** Could it be that there are plodders who are wasting their lives? Plodding may be the reason that people have such small visions. Don't we need big visions—the kind that involve breaking down barriers, evangelizing entire countries, starting church planting movements, and igniting Christian awakenings in closed-access territories? But a plodder—one who loyally stays the course—can't see the vast forest of opportunity for the single tree in front of him. Instead of a potentially fruitful ministry, he settles for the plodding that is in reality ineffectiveness.

These are hard words. Harsh is more like it. Isn't this kind of writing discouraging, hurtful, and arrogant? Doesn't it disregard the Bible's teaching on faithfulness?

No.

An explanation is in order. The above dangers are legitimate, but they are dangers that describe someone who is plodding without perspective. Plodding without perspective is akin to ministry suicide—discouragement, burnout, and ineffectiveness. The plodder whose perspective has vanished is someone who is so embroiled in the complexities of ministry that he fails to see the purpose behind it all. Plodding is not wrong. Plodding is what God has called us to do as ministers. But plodding without perspective is harmful indeed.

### **How It Strikes**

The peril of plodding without perspective can happen easily. It can happen without your knowing it. Here's how perspective dies on the plodder's path.

- **Plodding without perspective happens when you're too busy.** Is there any one of us, especially those of us in ministry, who is not busy? Our culture is a busy culture. A ministry life is a busy life. But busyness is a vision killer. When your mind is crowded with the next thing on your agenda, it's virtually impossible to mentally soar to 20,000 feet and get a perspective on the big picture. This is plodding without perspective. The next thing. The next project. The next sermon. The next week. That's not vision. That's not perspective. And sooner or later, a ministry runs aground or you burnout. Unless we take time to think—to just stop and think—we will lose our sense of

perspective. Busyness can too easily blind us to the needs, the big picture needs, of ministry.

- **Plodding without perspective happens when you lack mission or vision.** A ministry without a mission or vision is like a car with its headlights turned off driving along a curvy, unlit mountain road at night. Pretty soon, the car is going over a cliff. Mission and vision serve to illumine the road, providing direction for the future. Just having a mission or vision isn't going to make everything better, however. That mission or vision must be kept front and center in your mind lest you lose perspective and plod along in the night on an unlit, curvy mountain path.
- **Plodding without perspective happens when you don't pray.** Prayer is the God-given means by which you make your requests known unto God. It is invaluable for maintaining a proper perspective on ministry. It's not just our lack of prayer that's the problem. It's the heart attitude behind that lack of prayer. A prayerless life is a self-centered life. It is a symptom of a person who thinks that they can do it on their own. Neglecting prayer and relying on one's self is a tragic perspective shift—from God to self. It will ruin your ministry.
- **Plodding without perspective happens when you don't read your Bible.** It sounds so elementary that you may be tempted to skip this paragraph. Scripture intake is crucial for setting your perspective right. Without a biblical worldview, you will have a cramped worldview—the kind that destroys perspective and wears down your ministry. Take a fresh look at what you're reading: the story-line of the Bible, the Kingdom theme, the ministry of Jesus, the shocking story of redemption, the scandal of sin, the power of grace, the epic climax in the book of Revelation. The Bible is the source of perspective. To neglect it is to neglect everything.
- **Plodding without perspective happens when you have no counselors.** Usually, a single person is not capable of possessing the right perspective all by himself. As Proverbs teaches, counselors are necessary for safety. Often, pastors attempt to function as lone and fearless leaders. But every pastor needs a team of supporters. Without a coterie of counselors, he will become imbalanced. In other words, he will lose perspective. It's not just that a pastor needs counselors. He needs the right kind of counselors. He needs counselors that are biblically grounded and who have the right vision for the ministry.

## **Plodding and Faithfulness**

Although plodding without perspective is a ministry killer, plodding with perspective is a good thing. Kevin DeYoung writes of “[the glory of plodding](#),” and describes these plodding Christians as “plodding visionaries.” Profitable plodding is plodding with perspective—with vision. There's no good in merely being a plodder. But a plodding *visionary*? That requires perspective.

True plodding is in a sense the same as faithfulness. Jesus calls upon His servants to be faithful, even if it's faithfulness over small things ([Luke 16:10](#)). In [Acts 11:23](#), Paul exhorted the Antioch church to “remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.” Faithfulness, or we could call it “plodding,” doesn't happen in a vacuum of perspective. It happens when we have “steadfast purpose.” Inherent in the word *faithful* is the idea of being faithful *to* something—not to an ideal, or to a career, or to a ministry, but to a Person. Faithfulness is grounded in a life-changing knowledge of God. Faithful plodding necessitates the right view of God.

It may be that you are the small-town pastor at a small-time church. Families are falling apart. Nobody is getting saved. Ministry is discouraging, and you don't even have enough money to fix the leaking roof. Do you have perspective? Then be faithful. Plod away. Maybe your life has been characterized by radical vision met with realistic discouragement. Do you have perspective? Then plod on, my friend. Do you lack visible results or big numbers? If your perspective is intact, plod on. Are you a missionary whose prayer letters have no news of conversions? Cling to your perspective and plod on.

The contemporary fixation on a radical Christian life and on daring deeds really strips the romance away from faithfulness. There's nothing radical and earth-shaking about faithfulness. But God requires faithfulness from his servants. Be faithful. Plod.

But plod with the right perspective.

## **How to Regain Perspective**

If your plodding has degenerated into a perspective-deprived drudgery, it's time to change things. How do you regain the right perspective?

- Take a break. One of the hardest things to do on the roller coaster of ministry is to get off. Just as you think you might swing a leg over the edge and step onto the stable platform, you feel the roller coast jerk forward, and you hang on for dear life. It's much easier to fall out of a roller coaster than to safely step off. Saying “take a break” to a man in the ministry may seem

like saying “take a deep breath” to someone underwater. I know it's hard, but this is important. Would you rather waste years of ministry by plodding without perspective, or get a few days behind schedule? You need to take a break and just think. It may just be a day. Ideally, it would be two or three or four days. Whatever time you can take off, just do it. Go somewhere private and think, pray, and regain your perspective.

- Establish your ministry vision and mission. If your ministry lacks a clear vision and mission statement, it's time to draw one up. Or, if you have a mission and vision, but they are forgotten or defunct, scrap it and start afresh. The very process of developing ministry vision is an exciting activity that quickly aligns your perspective and furnishes you with fresh power for ministry.

This article started with Carey's quote, “I can plod.” That's not the end of Carey's quote. His next sentence is, “I can persevere in any definite pursuit.” Plodding by itself isn't worth any accolades. It is only when one has a “definite pursuit,”—a faith-filled, God-given perspective on life—that he can plod, persevere, and succeed. Missionary Hudson Taylor famously summed it up: “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.” That's what plodding *with* perspective is all about.