

Stay the Course

How do we minister out of brokenness?

by Matthew Ellison

Difficulty, suffering, and affliction are common to everyone. Those who follow Christ, as well as those who do not, are born for trouble. Job 5:7 says it plainly, "Man is born for trouble, as the sparks fly upward." No one, absolutely no one, is exempt from the troubles of this life.

So if the Great Commission is going to become part of the fabric of our lives, if we are going to **stay the course**, the question we must answer then is: *How do we minister out of our brokenness? And how do we help others to?*

How do we minister to a lost world when day after day, week after week, month after month there are so many disappointments and frustrations in our own lives that we don't feel like we have resources left for anyone else? And how do we prepare future workers to serve in the face of sometimes unrelenting hardship?

Answering these questions is critical because *brokenness* seems to be where most people live. Do you know anyone who ministers out of complete wholeness? Neither do I. Wholeness is simply not part of the deal in a fallen world.

Let me share an example of ministry endurance that I believe is simply incomprehensible for the average churchgoer in America:

A Southern Baptist worker critically injured in Iraq re-

ports she has been "recovering physically and learning how to live with grief" since the March 2004 attack that killed her husband.

"God has been showing Himself faithful," said Carrie McDonnall, "I encourage those who have known suffering to rely on God and to focus on Him. You can trust Him."



McDonnall was the lone survivor of the attack in which her husband and three other IMB personnel died.

"David and I left for Iraq because we desired to see God exalted in the lives of the Iraqi people.... It wasn't because of some great missionary calling that we went. We were simply two children who remembered what brokenness felt like and remembered that feeling of grace in Jesus. We wanted to share that in a land that did not know Him."

McDonnall told Baptist Press that the greatest thing she learned from the attack is that "God is sovereign and more loving than we would have ever imagined. That was a hard lesson for me to learn. It's coming through something like this where everything else is saying it's not, and it doesn't match up, that He is faithful."

Concerning the future, McDonnall said, "There's no way I can say what He has in store. My heart is definitely for missions. Really, I just want to be about His business. If His business is me overseas, I'm gone."

Here is a young woman who went to the mission field, to one of the hardest places on the planet, lost her husband, and nearly lost her own life. She's undergoing tremendous grief and affliction, and yet she is staying the course. She currently serves in a ministry she helped launch which is appropriately named, "Carry On."

Suffering has hit close to home for me and my family over the last several years. It has transformed my outlook on life and ministry. In a nutshell, I have come to believe that life and ministry will not be pain free; they will not be easy. The ride will not be smooth or danger free—difficulty and disappointment will abound. Why? Because a trouble-free life is simply not part of the deal in a fallen world.

So how do we stay the course and help others persevere? When we live in a broken world full of broken people, when we ourselves are broken and we don't feel like we have anything left to give, how do we minister and prepare others to endure—not just endure but thrive—in ministry in those realities?

How do we *stay the course*?

Well that is what this year's Interchange Conference is all about! We hope you'll join us as we wrestle with the practical issues of (1) how to develop resilience in ourselves and other workers, (2) how to nurture longevity in partnerships, and (3) how to build continuity into church missions leadership structures.

If you would like to interact in advance with these questions or suggest specific "stay the course" issues you are dealing with, visit our new [Catalyst blog](#) accessible from our home page.

By the way, it can be done! At times it seems impossible but by God's grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit it is possible. See you at Interchange!



Matthew Ellison is the president and church missions coach at [Sixteen:Fifteen](#). He will be the keynote speaker at both Interchange Conferences this year:

- Denver /November 1
- Philadelphia /November 28.

[Conference details](#)

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