

## Prescription for a Discouraged Librarian by Lynn Austin

If you're discouraged, you're not alone. Most church librarians get discouraged from time to time. Some of them even quit.

Many factors contribute to this feeling: lack of space, nobody caring, nobody reading, or not being valued your work. People say, or think, "Oh, they are only books. Those aren't important."

Many of you feel discouraged because you think, *Is all this work really important? Does it matter in the bigger scheme of things, especially when you look at the situation the world is in?*

The answer to both of these questions is yes!

As an antidote to this discouragement, I want to point out that this ministry you have taken over is a unique calling. You have been chosen by God to be a librarian and have a special set of gifts and talents you probably don't even realize you have. I also want to show you that your work is an important ministry in the body of Christ. Maybe then you can see that sometimes the discouragement you feel is from Satan, our enemy, who doesn't want you to be involved in an important ministry.

### A Unique Calling

I believe that being a book lover is a spiritual gift from God. You don't find the term *librarian* in the Bible. It's not a visible gift like teacher, pastor, author, or singer—and because it is not visible, we take it for granted. You do not recognize the gift in yourself because it comes so naturally. Not everyone feels the way you do about books. God gave you this love of books because He has an important ministry for you.

I also believe you come from a long tradition of librarians. You don't find them in the Bible, but God has had librarians—people with your gifts—for centuries. If you think about it, our Bible is a mini library: 66 books. It consists of a variety of books: poetry, history, law, wisdom, literature, collections of letters, eyewitness accounts, military battles, songs, prophecies, biographies, and even love stories.

But did you ever stop to think about who saved all these books for centuries and centuries? How is it that we have these 66 books of the Bible? Throughout the years, God had people—both men and women—that he called to be librarians, people who valued books and who saved all these precious volumes.

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible around 1400 B.C. So how is it they have been saved all these years? Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles reveal that at the end of those history books, Israel was exiled to Babylon. How did those books get saved in that huge upheaval of war and exile? I believe it was because there were people of Israel who were willing to take the books with them. They could not stand to go into exile without saving these precious books.

What about the Book of Esther? That book takes place in Persia during the exile. The name of God isn't even mentioned in it. How is it that it was brought back and put into the collection with the other books of the Bible? Someone saw the value of this book, saved it, and brought it back. Now who might that be? Perhaps someone with the same calling you have.

Psalms and proverbs, poetry and songs were collected over thousands of years. Who collected them? Who kept these altogether in a nice neat collection and organized them? Someone with your gift.

What about the prophets? Ezekiel and Daniel were written in exile. How is it that we have these books today? In the Book of Jeremiah, there's a story that strikes fear in the heart of every author. King Jehoiakim was sitting by the fireplace, and Jehudi was reading from Jeremiah's book. Every time he read a certain amount, the king took out his knife and cut off part of the scroll and threw it into the fire. I've had bad editors, but never one that harsh! Jeremiah got into a lot of trouble for writing that book. What about the people who saved it? They took a risk by having it in their home.

Fortunately for us, all those books were saved. Fortunately for Christ, too, because in His time these books had been saved and He could use them and quote from them. Suppose we didn't have them. Suppose someone got too discouraged and gave up the job and started throwing books away.

What about the gospels? Copies were made and passed out all over the Roman Empire. Luke was an eyewitness and wrote his gospel to a man named Theophilus. We don't know anything about him. Suppose Luke's wife threw out this letter.

Or consider the epistles. I'm sure many of you have a bundle of letters somewhere in your house that you have been saving. Likewise, someone saved these letters for us to read today.

Like some of the Old Testament books, the Book of Revelation was written in exile. Israel was destroyed in 70 A.D. How is it that this book was saved and passed on?

The common thread in all this information is that there were people like you who have a gift from God to love books, ideas, and words and who have the passion to save them and pass them on to other people.

I think you would agree that we owe an enormous debt to all these unsung people we know nothing about. So your job has been around for thousands of years. I thank God for it and I hope you see that your task today is as important as the saving of the books of the Bible.

### **An Important Ministry**

Your calling isn't only about preserving words, though. It's also about passing them on, making them available to other people to read, which is an important, God-given ministry. This is what he wants you to do.

We serve the God of the written Word and the living Word. God's revelation of himself to us comes to us in what form? The Bible, a book. Now if that doesn't show you the importance God places on books and the written word, nothing else can.

Your work is a vital and important ministry. There is a job description for ministry in Ephesians 4:1-16 (NIV). Paul began with this admonition: "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." And I hope by now I have convinced you that you have a unique calling. In verse 7, he wrote, "To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it," and he gave gifts to men and women. Paul named some of them: apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, librarians. You won't find librarians in the original text or translations, but I believe it's true.

Paul went on to explain why Christ gifted believers: "to prepare God's people for works of service." Are there books in your library that prepare God's people for works of

service? Absolutely. The books you put in your library can help people prepare to teach the Bible, lead a wide variety of church ministries, and serve people in their communities.

Christ gave gifts to men, so his body of believers may be built up, or strengthened. Are there books in your library that can do that? Absolutely. Bible commentaries, theology books, books on prayer, parenting, finances, marriage, etc., can all help build up the body of Christ. When you loan these books and borrowers read them, the body of Christ grows toward maturity, “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). That’s why he gave you your gift.

### **Remember**

In light of your unique calling and important ministry, why do you feel discouraged? What causes your passion to grow cold? Some of the more common answers are: fear of failure; feeling that nobody cares and your work is in vain; or other things such as tiredness and not being valued.

But discouragement primarily comes from trying to do whatever we do in our own strength. God wants us to work with him. Plugging into the Power Source is the secret of preventing burnout.

Very simply, here is my prescription for discouragement: Remember.

Remember you are uniquely called by God.

Remember your work is important ministry.

Remember you are gifted; you have talent in the ministry to which God has called you. God gave you the gift; but you must develop it, work at it using it.

So fuel your passion for your library ministry by remembering these truths. Know you are called and gifted and chosen for this work, and the work God has given you is changing lives everywhere. Know you are not alone, but part of a long history of librarians, passing on God’s truth and seeing people grow as a result.

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