

Two Warning Signs  
by  
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Do you ever find yourself becoming irritable? Like when your pet peeves turn from cocker spaniels into German shepherds? When the least little things sets you off, as when somebody says “How are you?” and you say “Why do you ask?” Irritability is one of two important warning signs that we who are in ministry need to notice and attend to.

Are you ever discouraged? Not the sense of frustration that comes with something not going exactly as you hoped, but a profound and oppressive conviction that there really is no hope, this church/school is not going anywhere, and I’m not likely to amount to much of anything. Discouragement is the other important warning sign to watch for.

I think of it this way in terms of the spiritual trio of faith, hope and love. When you’re irritable, your love may be running low. Instead of putting the best construction on everything, you might be interpreting the other person’s actions in the least charitable way.

When you’re discouraged, your hope is at a low level. You’re not looking forward to the future, you’re dreading it. Instead of living in anticipation of what tomorrow may bring, you’re thinking it’s going to be worse than today, and maybe much worse.

It’s important to remember that people whose faith is strong can have these times when their hope may be flickering and their love might be struggling. Being irritable and discouraged does not mean you’re a bad person or a lousy Christian. It’s just that you are going through a rough patch in your life and/or your ministry.

What to do about it? It may be something as simple as getting a little more sleep, going out for a walk most days, taking a nap in the afternoon, scheduling a bit more time between meetings and appointments, or cutting down on fatty foods. Not every problem is an issue of salvation or sanctification. There may be a “First Article” (creation) way to deal with the problem raised by one or both of these two warning signs.

The key thing is to recognize the situation for what it is and to realize that you are not alone in feeling as you do. Being irritable or discouraged is not the end of the world or of your ministry. In fact, when you recognize these warning signs, talk about them with someone you trust, and take appropriate action, you’ll find out that they’re not really all that ominous, and you may well find yourself entering a new phase of joy and productivity.