

Listening Opens Eyes

Karen Woods, after 22 years in ministry, finds true church

After twenty-two years, Karen Woods was not only burned-out on ministry, she felt burned by ministry.

Karen marched (and marched others) to a never ceasing beat: Work hard. Pray harder. Give more. Obey your pastor. She believed she was loved only because she worked so hard. More work meant more love.

Karen said with a sigh, "I was driven, and I drove others. You want the blessing? Then earn it," she told people.

She describes herself during that period like the Apostle Paul, before he was an apostle and before he was called Paul. "I landed hard on people who weren't doing things the right way....my way"

Her years in high-powered national ministries and jobs leading worship in prominent churches had opened her eyes to the dark under-belly of some ministries. "They were toxic, and I was toxic, too."

She never realized how toxic until the unthinkable happened. After years of climbing the ministry corporate ladder to the top, she got pushed off.

"Getting laid off broke me." She stopped going to church. Anger simmered in her soul. She never wanted to see another pastor or leader again.



For several months, Karen drifted in that dark place. Then out of the blue a friend invited her to a listening seminar offered by Equipping Ministries International in Cincinnati. "Whatever," she thought to herself. Since one of her two degrees is in counseling, she thought she had that base covered. But she went anyway.

"God has a sense of humor." Karen explained, "When the seminar broke up into smaller groups, I was the only female in a group of all pastors and leaders." She wanted to tune them out, but something strange happened. The pastors were sharing their weaknesses, and how inadequate they felt. "I was shocked. In the ministry world I had been in, leaders never show weakness."

But Karen saw their humanity--and liked what she saw--leaders being real about their weaknesses. She felt a flicker of hope.

Karen's eyes were opened, which is ironic as she is legally blind. "For the first time, I learned biblical ways to connect to others in a refreshing way... loving as Jesus loves. I didn't know that empathy, warmth, and respect could be taught. I'm so blessed to experience the love of Jesus now in a much healthier way... Christian community, real friendship, and true love. This is church!"

Now, years later, Karen is a certified EMI trainer. Her ministry--Heart of the Matter Ministries International--partners with EMI. Karen is currently in India with an EMI team to minister to the blind, to gypsies, to church leaders and to women and children impacted by the tsunami.