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A new way of life in ministry: sustaining hope in the midst of burnout

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George Fox University

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A NEW WAY OF LIFE IN MINISTRY:
SUSTAINING HOPE IN THE MIDST OF BURNOUT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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NEWBERG, OREGON

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

D.Min. Dissertation

This is to certify that the D.Min. Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on March 12, 2012
as fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

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ABSTRACT

Christian leaders, and more specifically pastors, are dropping out of the ministry at an alarming rate as a result of burnout. However, there is a new way of life in ministry available to us through important keys for sustaining hope.

In the **introduction**, the problem of ministers leaving the ministry is presented. The thesis will state that there are important keys for a new way of life in ministry and sustaining hope. There is an overview of the dissertation explaining the focus of each section.

In the **biblical** section, I will present scriptural support for believing that God gives reasons for sustaining hope in His principles and promises.

The **historical** section will offer reasons for hope based on specific models in Christian history. In these historical figures, we recognize the deep love of God, and life-giving patterns for ministry.

The third section will focus on **relational** keys to healing and new hope within community. In deeper relationships, pastors may discover how grace flows through a healthy community.

The fourth section will focus primarily on the **emotional** issues that will include topics such as dealing with loss, reframing our definition of reality, self-differentiation, and living with both joy and pain.

The fifth section will focus on the importance of a pattern for **spiritual** growth, the work of the Spirit, and spiritual disciplines.

The sixth section will focus on the **theological** importance of God's unfailing love revealed in the incarnation and life of Christ, the comfort of the Spirit, our place in God's story, and resurrection power for facing life's challenges.

In the **conclusion**, we will look at hope as also something we do. We will review our reasons for hope in Christ, and finding rest in ways that are Biblical, Historical, Relational, Emotional, Spiritual, and Theological to finish strong.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Blinded by despair, Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* sought help from Evangelist. He feared that the burden on his back would “sink him lower than the grave”.¹ Christian would fly from his condition, but did not know where to go. Evangelist pointed out over a wide field toward a gate, but Christian could not see it. Evangelist responded to Christian who seemed blinded by his despair saying. “Do you see yonder Shining Light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that Light in your eye, and go up directly thereto”.² Evangelist encouraged Christian to walk toward the Light, and he would be told what he should do.

In this paper, it is my intent to keep pointing to the Light as a new way of life in ministry. Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”³ In Christ, we discover keys for sustaining hope in the midst of our own darkness and despair. In the midst of burnout, the words of Evangelist can help us find our way to hope. Keep walking toward the Light, especially when we are blinded by disappointments and tempted to go our own way.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the twelve.⁴ This question was asked of Christ’s disciples. People were leaving the Lord when their own plans were not working out so well. “The crowds who wanted to make Jesus king melt away when

¹ Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 15.

² Ibid.

³ John 8:12

⁴ John 6:67 (NASB) All Scriptures are in the New American Standard Bible version unless otherwise noted.

He makes it plain that His kingdom is not of this world, and the disappointed disciples who cannot stomach His teaching join them.”⁵

Think about it. What would be our answer to this penetrating question from the Lord to His closest followers? “Will you leave me too?” One should not assume that there may never be a good reason to leave one place or form of ministry for another. Jesus told His disciples that they should move on if they were rejected at the place where they were doing ministry. Jesus said, “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.”⁶ This was a sign to them of God’s judgment, for in rejecting followers or “emissaries of Messiah,” they were rejecting the Lord.⁷

There may, in fact be good and healthy reasons for a person to leave full time ministry which are within God’s will. John Engler has written an excellent article on healthy, scriptural reasons for leaving a church based on the lives of leaders in the early church from the scriptures.⁸ He gives these reasons for making such an important choice in ministry:

Matter of Personal Choice
Desire to Be with Friends in the Faith
Going Home or Returning to Family
Business

⁵ Murray, George R. Word Biblical Commentary, vol.2. ed. by Ralph P. Martin (Waco: Word Book, 1986), 97.

⁶ Matthew 10:14

⁷ Carson, D.A. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol.8, ed. Frank E Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 246.

⁸ Engler, John. "Scriptural Reasons For Leaving A Church." Barnabas Ministries: A Ministry to Ministers. 2005. <http://www.barnabas-ministries.com/> (accessed January 6, 2012). Engler has an excellent article giving reasons why the Lord led His people away from one form or place of ministry to another.

Healing from Difficult or Overwhelming Situations
Getting Away from Unhealthy Circumstances or Leaders
Irreconcilable Differences
Fleeing Persecution

Healthy reasons like these and others are important and helpful for those in fulltime vocational service, but this is not the focus of this work.

Let Christ's questions to his disciples take us to those moments in ministry when we were not so sure how to respond to such a question. Jesus knew the hearts of His followers long ago, and He knows when, in our own hearts, His servants might be tempted to leave Him or our vocation of ministry for unnecessary reasons. Here is that question in its scriptural context.

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.⁹

Jesus was saying hard things to His disciples, and their response reflects the kind of confusion and doubt that many ministers may feel when nothing seems to make sense.

"Those who wanted a temporal king who would give them food for the body turned their

⁹ John 6:57-67.

backs on the King's Son when He promised a banquet truly royal for the soul."¹⁰ Not all ministers who leave the ministry are turning their backs on Christ, but ministers do experience similar stress at incredible levels, with confusion and tensions that have the potential to turn a minister, once devoted to his profession, to choose to leave the ministry due to a loss of hope.

Stressors facing clergy include role conflicts, proliferation of activities, discrepancy between amount of time in administrative duties versus pastoral duties, spiritual dryness, perfectionism, no time for study or to be alone, failure of dreams, unwelcome surprise, frustration, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, loneliness, isolation, and unrealistic expectations of oneself, the senior pastor of one's congregation, and of one's denomination.¹¹

This paper is written for those in ministry, especially those of the Evangelical Friends Church denomination, who are struggling with the challenges of life and service to the point of feeling inadequate, overwhelmed by expectations, lonely if not abandoned, and might say they are facing "burnout." We are tempted to look for a way to escape our situation, and follow our colleagues out the door of ministry, with the same mindset that I had when I once followed another driver right through a red light. I failed to stop when I should have. How many dangerous "red lights" do we run through by making reckless choices, which lead to emptiness, feelings of failure, and hidden thoughts of desperation?

There are times when ministers feel not only disappointment and a lack of understanding, but also a very real lack of hope. In my experience, I have come to understand that there are those in ministry who can relate to a "great sadness" in their

¹⁰Beasley-Murray, George R. *Word Biblical Commentary, vol 36*, ed. by Ralph P. Martin (Columbia: Thomas Nelson 1999), 97.

¹¹McMinn, Mark. "Care For Pastors: Learning From Clergy." *Pastoral Psychology*, July 2005: vol. 53, 6.

lives and ministry, as described in *The Shack* by Wm. Paul Young. It is like a heavy quilt, with the weight of it able to dull the eyes and stoop the shoulders, and efforts to shake it off are exhausting. It is as if you are “wearing a leaden bathrobe—trudging the murky despondency that sucked the color out of everything.”¹²

In this paper I will attempt to answer the question why this is the experience of so many in ministry. I will also endeavor to show how it is possible to respond to this state of mind with reasons for hope and ways to sustain such hope over a lifetime of service, whether a person is in ministry as a profession or in some other form of Christian service he or she has chosen.

The Problem

Discouraged by the stress and pressures of ministry, leaders are losing hope and leaving. Christian leaders, and more specifically pastors, are dropping out of the ministry at an alarming rate, according to statistics in the next section. A common term used when facing such stress and fatigue in ministry is “burnout.” One medical definition of burnout is “An emotional condition marked by tiredness, loss of interest, or frustration that interferes with job performance. Burnout is usually regarded as the result of prolonged stress.”¹³

Some of the first concerns about burnout in the bible are discovered in Exodus 18:13-18. Moses was giving leadership and guidance to the people of Israel who were

¹² Paul Young. *The Shack*. (Newbury Park, California: Windblown Media, 2007), 25.

¹³ Olendorf, Donna, Christine Jeryan, Karen Boyden. *The Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine*. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1999).

coming to him day and night. His father-in-law, Jethro, asked Moses why he was doing such a huge job all alone. Moses explained that the people came to him for his help from morning to evening. Jethro responded saying “The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you, you cannot do it alone.”¹⁴

Dr. Larry Day gives this formula for “burnout” in his workshops. “Good intentions + poor choices + enough time = Burnout.”¹⁵ Moses had good intentions to help the people, but made the poor choice of trying to do it alone, and there was not enough time in a day to be able to care for all of the people as well as himself.

There is another place in scriptures that helps define the kind of stress and burnout being discussed in this paper. There is a description of such a condition to be found in the Prophet Elijah’s experience in the Old Testament book of 1 Kings.

Elijah was greatly used of God. Yet this is the same man whom we find later under a juniper tree in the wilderness—suffering from burnout. Burnout can occur in the physical, emotional, and spiritual areas of life. Sometimes it affects only one or two of these areas, but it often takes its toll in all three, as it did with Elijah. He was physically exhausted from running before King Ahab’s chariot some 25 miles from Mount Carmel to the entrance of Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46). He was emotionally drained as evidenced by his wish to die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life” (1 Kings 19:4). He was spiritually distraught, which was shown by his words, “I, even I only, am left” (1 Kings 19:10).¹⁶

¹⁴ Exodus 18:17,18.

¹⁵ Day, Dr. Larry. Formula for Burnout. Image Bearers International, February 18, 2012. Dr. Day leads a ministry called Image Bearers International. He presents workshops throughout the country for the purpose of equipping individuals, families, and churches for healthy Christian living. His web site is <http://www.imagebearersintl.com/about.html>.

¹⁶Yearick, David. "Pastor/Leadership:Dealing with Personal Burnout in Ministry." *Crosswalk.com*. September 14, 2007. <http://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership> (accessed January 5, 2012).

Physical exhaustion, emotional fatigue, and spiritual distress can come together in ways that can be overwhelming to any pastor. This condition when all three have converged at once on a pastor is what is meant by burnout. It can cause a Christian leader to leave the ministry for reasons other than reasonable, healthy choices. Let us look at some of the evidence that there is a real problem with ministers quitting as a result of stress and feelings of “burnout” as described above.

Statistical Evidence

Important research has discovered evidence of discontent among those in the ministry. In the following statistics we can observe how troubled many pastors are who demonstrate serious issues and face the problem of burnout in the ministry.

- Of the 500,000 full-time, vocational pastors in the United States today, approximately one out of every four (125,000) are experiencing “burnout”.
- 60% work more than 60 hours per week
- 80% believe that ministry has adversely affected their families
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month
- 37% confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church (which is about the same percentage as the general population)
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend
- 70% have a lower self-image than when they entered ministry
- 70% say they get less than seven hours of sleep each night
- 75% do not take a regular day off for Sabbath rest
- 76% are overweight or obese (compared with 61% of the general population)
- 40% reported being depressed or worn out “some or most of the time”
- Not surprisingly, 40% of these pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone
- Tragically, 1,500 pastors actually do leave public ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout or contention in their churches¹⁷

¹⁷ Hoge, Dean R., and Jacqueline E. Wenger. “Experiences of Protestant Ministers Who Left Local Church Ministry.” Presentation to the Religious Research Association, (Norfolk, VA, October 25, 2003).

“Needless to say, this statistical litany clearly indicates that a large proportion of our spiritual leaders are currently experiencing an extraordinary level of job-related stress and burnout. As a result, many of them are leaving public ministry ... Many others limp along, hoping to find ways to survive with some portion of their spiritual vitality and personal integrity intact.”¹⁸

Although ministers may feel like running away from ministry as a full time vocation, which at times feels like a nightmare, they could instead discover new ways of viewing their situation. They could be helped by reframing their perspective of relationships with the Lord and others, and applying life-giving keys for sustaining their hope, if it is not the will of God for them to leave their ministry. Those who have been serving in fulltime ministry and are now discouraged may be forgetting that nothing has separated them from God’s love or God’s plan for their lives.

Romans 8:35-39 says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us ... nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁹ There is no question that God’s love remains the same for us at all times and in all situations. The Apostle Paul’s “thought and assurance embrace all that is or can be imagined as belonging to the full sweep of space as well as

¹⁸Williams, David O. "Sustaining Leadership For The Long Haul: The Center For Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College." Diss., Leadership and Spiritual Formation, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Newberg, OR, 2009. Williams is quoting from Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, *Extreme Church Makeover* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 12.

¹⁹ Romans 8:35-39.

of time.”²⁰ Even when you may feel completely alone or unloved in ways which cause you to want to quit vocational ministry, still none of what may make you feel this way separates you or creates distance between you and the Lord’s love.

God’s plan for every believer in Christ is to be involved in God’s work in the world, regardless of what our circumstances might be. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”²¹ Nothing in our experience has changed God’s plan, no matter how discouraged we might become with the realities of our individual context and circumstances. There may be good reasons for going new directions within God’s will, but in our worst times, we have the on-going hope that God’s love is still operating in our lives as we keep our faith and focus on Him.

According to scriptures, God has known us and been thinking of each of us before we were born. The Psalmist wrote, “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. How precious are Thy thoughts to me, O God.”²² Here, “the Psalmist regards himself as the object of God’s creative workmanship before his birth.”²³

This has relevance for vocational ministry. We, like Moses, at times feel inadequate to fulfill the responsibilities to do what He asks of us. Just as Moses spoke of

²⁰Dunn, James. *Word Biblical Commentary. Vol.38* ed. Ralph E. Martin (Waco: Word Books Publisher), 1986, 508.

²¹ Ephesians 2:10.

²² Psalm 139:16-17a.

²³Allan, Leslie C. *Word Biblical Commentary, vol.5* ed. William A. VanGemeren Psalms (Waco: Word Book Publisher, 1986), 262.

his limitations when he was asked to go to Pharaoh and lead God's people,²⁴ we too may focus on our limitations instead of on the fact that we are God's creative workmanship. In Psalm 139, the Lord reminds us that he made us the way we are, and with His help it is enough for all that he asks of us. As we commit ourselves to God's will for our lives, our lives become the fulfillment of a plan that is born in the very heart of God. This began even while we were still in our "mother's womb."²⁵

In Christ, we are living out God's purposes as Paul described them in Ephesians 2:10. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand." The reality of this passage is not diminished or changed by our circumstances, not by whatever others might say or think of us, nor even by our own feelings about ourselves.

Personally, I can say metaphorically that I am "living the dream" in every circumstance, no matter how I might be tempted to believe otherwise. By that, I mean that I am still living the life when God created me in my mother's womb, and still living out my story according to His will. It is living in Christ by His grace, the life and ministry, whether vocational or some other forms of service, which God has planned even before we were born. "By grace you have been saved, through faith ... for good works, which God has prepared beforehand."²⁶ There are times in ministry when I have wondered if God is able to use me for His purposes when I have been shredded by

²⁴ Exodus 4:10-13.

²⁵ Psalm 139:13.

²⁶ Ephesians 2:8,10.

criticism, or failed to inspire people beyond looking like they were simply waiting for a bus.

These biblical truths give me comfort and hope. No matter what we may feel or experience, servants are loved and living the dream of life and ministry in Christ, and that should help us to maintain our hope.

Thesis

It is my objective to offer a new paradigm, a new way of life in ministry, offering keys for sustaining hope in the midst of burnout. In the first chapter, it is my intent to show how hope may be sustained with reflection and re-evaluation of one's ministry based on a biblical understanding of God's promises. In the second chapter the focus will be on historical Christian thought as it may relate to characters who have dealt with troubling circumstances and the struggle with sustaining hope.

My logic for including these first two chapters is as follows: it is my assertion that through prayerful introspection and reflections on the way we live and serve, we discover keys for finding and sustaining new hope. It is my conviction that in Christ's invitation to come to Him and His ways and finding rest, pastors may persevere with sustainable hope in ministry, instead of giving up and quitting, as so many are doing according to both national statistics and my personal observations of colleagues in ministry.

Such helpful keys can assist readers in understanding how they may "be a mess on our best days,"²⁷ and yet, can be experiencing the hope of life and ministry in Christ,

²⁷ Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008.

even during those messy days. With such hope and confidence in Christ, ministers may better persevere in their work and service for the Lord.

Although the challenges in the daily practice of ministry are very real, troubling, and should not be dismissed, a pastor's way of defining life-draining issues often is the turning point for sustaining hope in the midst of their challenges. At times, I have had feelings of hopelessness and have noticed the same hopeless feelings in other ministers. Some ministers have chosen to leave vocational ministry because of such feelings, while we are often asked to be the ones who are expected to help others find hope. A new paradigm for hope is essential. We need a more accurate definition of reality based on God's love, acceptance, and presence, because our perception of reality influences relationships, emotional and spiritual well-being, as well as a minister's theological assurance. While my focus is primarily on providing help and renewed hope to those in fulltime ministry, the principles can be helpful to any believers who may be engaged in other ministries besides the pastorate. This will be touched on in concluding comments and at other places in the dissertation where appropriate.

The next five chapters will focus on important biblical materials referenced in chapter one. In chapter three, the material will focus on how to sustain hope from Christian history. In chapters four, five, six, and seven, we will be dealing with the importance of framing our views based on transformational keys. These keys for sustaining hope are relational, emotional, spiritual, and theological. These chapters will be followed by a conclusion, which will consider the challenges and offer summaries that support my claims in the following pages. The back material will include helpful appendixes, chapter notes, and a bibliography.

For the sake of clarity of purpose and intent, I am including a more detailed summary of what will be included in each chapter to follow:

Chapter 1

Introduction

In this section, I will present some the disturbing realities of the impact the struggles in ministry are having on those in fulltime Christian service. Such struggles have the effect of making us want to leave the ministry for no other reason than the feelings of burnout. Burnout is defined from both medical and biblical perspectives.

While there are healthy reasons for leaving the ministry as a matter of personal choice, there is a real problem that needs to be addressed. Stressors in the minister's life and profession are causing ministers to give up and leave, not as a matter of making a healthy choice, but as a matter of feeling overwhelmed and without hope.

Statistical evidence will be introduced to show the serious situation among clergy, who are experiencing high levels of joyless ministry and burnout and a loss of hope.

Scriptures will be shared to give us reasons for hope in the midst of feelings of burnout, no matter what may be our feelings or circumstances. We are always within the reach and care of God's love and can count on Him to help us live out a new way of life in keeping with His purposes.

The thesis of this paper is explained. Again, it is to offer a new way of life in ministry, offering keys for sustaining hope in the midst of burnout. Summaries of each of the chapters 2 through 7 will give overviews of important keys for sustaining hope. Topics will include biblical, historical, relational, emotional, spiritual, and theological keys for sustaining hope in burnout.

In the conclusion, there will be a summary of the new way of life discussed in this paper and the keys for sustaining hope in the midst of burnout. There will also be helpful material in the appendix for digging deeper into some of the topics discussed, as well as a bibliography.

Chapter 2

Biblical Materials

I will present scriptural support for believing that God has given us sufficient reasons for sustaining hope and being prepared for the ministry challenges we face in His Word. The evidence that God has a better approach for sustaining hope when we may be tempted to give up is found in Old Testament and New Testament characters, promises, and theological truths which can sustain us even in a fallen world where everybody hurts sometime. We will consider significant evidence for a biblical basis hope in this second chapter.

I will seek to show that carrying out our call may involve suffering with and for the Lord and others, but this service for Christ is consistent with God's plan and the "yoke of Christ." God's character will be considered as it is revealed in the scriptures, without the distortions that come from our feelings and the false notions we may come to believe.

The reader will be given scriptural support to believe that God can never act or be contrary to His character, even when our emotions might cause us to question His love and care. He is always present with us, and moves along the same tracks of our lives with us, even when we may feel alone or abandoned. There are Biblical reasons to believe that

being alive in Christ means having the hope that we can depend on Him completely, as we serve Him and live out His call.

I will attempt to demonstrate from scripture that the final word in our lives is not determined by our situations, nor our feelings about them. God gets the final word, and His promise is for “rest” for all who will accept Christ’s invitation to come to Him.²⁸

Chapter 3

Christian History

In this section, I will present reasons for hope based on specific individuals in Christian history. In these historical figures, we are able to discover life-giving patterns in the way we do self-care and think about experiences of confusion, humiliation, rejection, abandonment, opposition, and suffering. Learning new keys on the midst of trouble from these models can lead us to hope and to experience the deep love of God, which is found in Jesus Christ. In what may feel like our darkest hours, we may be entering into the joy of our deepest longings.

We will begin with a young female Christian servant as we consider figures who found ways to sustain hope in the midst of their most trying times. She discovers spiritual rhythm for facing those times when we need a new paradigm for hope. We will see in her life that darkness may become so severe it actually feels like hell in the sense of feeling separate from God, regardless of what the scriptures tell us about how God is always present, even when we cannot feel it to be true. This darkness will be shown to serve as a means for development and growth in surprising ways.

²⁸ Matthew 11:28.

The troubles we go through affect us at many levels of our being. We will show how one may enter into the darkness as an active choice, just as Jesus went into the wilderness, and other times we enter such times in a more passive way according to circumstances which are beyond our control, as in the case of the Apostle Paul. In Paul's life we discover how times of suffering may actually be able to demonstrate the goodness of God, as He helps us accomplish more than we think is possible in our times of weakness.

In history, there is much we can learn as we encounter faithful servants who stayed the course in the worst of times. The evidence of a new way of life in ministry and or their ability to maintain their hope will be found in their examples and in their expressions of faith and practice.

Chapter 4

New Hope In and Through Relationships

This chapter will focus on **relational** ways those in the pastoral ministry can experience healing and new hope within the context of our faith community.

If humans are indeed relational by nature, and if we take the doctrine of the trinity seriously, then we must change the way we talk about our spiritual journey. It is really not "my" journey, but "our" journey. It is essential that spiritual formation literature deal with ecclesiology. What does it mean for spiritual formation that we are the body of Christ—that is the church?²⁹

I will seek to show that in trying to keep strong enough to engage the spiritual Enemy it is a temptation for ministers to keep, or at least allow, distance between them and other people. At the same time, the devil works all the angles to trouble ministers in

²⁹ Bassett, Rodney L. "Finding Our Way Home: Turning Back to What Matters Most." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 2006: Vol. 25, No.3, 274-280.

relationships.³⁰ One of the schemes of the devil seems to be that he often draws men and women into isolation and despair. In such isolation, there is only an illusion of peace and safety. In desperate solitary moments, when all hope of experiencing life-giving community is gone, ministers are forced to make a choice.

“Either we can live as unique members of a connected community, experiencing the fruit of Christ’s life within us, or we can live as terrified, demanding, self-absorbed islands, disconnected from community and desperately determined to get by with whatever resources we brought to our island with us.”³¹

Disappointing pain in relationships, and our own hypocrisy³² toward others, both have the potential to drive clergy away from what they once thought was a clear calling into ministry. (As noted below, the word “hypocrisy” used by Robert Quinn is a reference to a lack of authenticity.) We will be able to see that with new trust developed in deeper relationships with others, pastors may be able to experience liberation from the isolation which typically characterizes the life of many pastors. Evidence will be presented to show how ministers may discover how grace flows through community.

Chapter 5

Emotional Keys for Sustaining Hope

³⁰ I use the term “enemy” of our souls to describe the devil, who is mentioned in Ephesians 6:11. “Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” In this context, the devil and his forces continually come against God’s people in spiritual warfare.

³¹ Crabb, Larry. *Connecting: Healing For Ourselves and Our Relationships*. (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005), 31.

³² The term “hypocrisy” is here used to define our way of relating to others within the church and in other organizations, which is really contrary to what we say we value and believe, based on the biblical teachings of unconditional love. We will consider Robert Quinn’s writings on this topic in *Building A Bridge As You Walk On It* later in this section.

This chapter will focus primarily on the emotional issues which are important to those in ministry. This will include consideration of topics such as self-image, self-differentiation, self-esteem, self-awareness, healthy conflict management, grief, depression, loss, and more. It is imperative to consider the connection between the way ministers feel, think, and behave under stress and pressure. There will be consideration of the interplay between our thoughts, feelings and behavior, and the ways in which they impact each other, as well as the effect of stress on functioning in each of these areas. Evidence will show that there can be a new sense of hope by following the ways and teaching of the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

In this section, I will present emotional keys for sustaining hope in the ministry. We will show how important keys for sustaining hope in ministry include an emotional ability to understand one's self, and function within stress and chaos as a non-anxious presence. There will be consideration of what is needed for emotional strength and stability to transcend the anxiety all around us.

We will focus on the need for self-differentiation³³ while staying connected with others. There will be a presentation of how to go about being differentiated in real-life situations in various family systems³⁴ including our homes, as well as in leadership roles in the church and other organizations in which we serve. This part of the dissertation may

³³ Self-differentiation is a concept that will be discussed in depth in this Relational section. According to Edwin Friedman in *Failure Of Nerve*, "differentiation means the capacity to become oneself out of one's self, with minimum reactivity to the positions or reactivity of others ... charting one's way by one's own internal guidance system", 183.

³⁴ Edwin Friedman, in *Generation to Generation* says that the clergy has an important advantage as a leader "when they adopt a family approach to symptoms in children...leadership in families with problem children will be just as relevant for leadership in congregational families.", 102.

take the reader into difficult times and places of reflection and introspection, but the payoff is a new paradigm for sustaining hope.

An important segment will focus on the dangers of emotionally drifting to the dark side,³⁵ with a focus that is based more on meeting our own needs which may cause us to be co-dependent, power-hungry, narcissistic, paranoid, etc. It is here, in honest personal evaluation of our motives and habits, where we find hope in dealing with our addictions and attachments.

I will also show that in the life of the minister there is a great need for hope in the midst of loss. The way of Christ is the way of the Incarnation and the descending way³⁶, which is the way of loss and grief. Especially in the ministry, we deal with an “everyday kind of loss” even on our best days. It is essential for us to consider how to deal with such feelings of grief and loss in healthy ways that will include and require Christ’s strength and grace.

In final notes, I offer a profile of what explorers long ago possessed, and what it will take to lead others into a new world of risk-taking courage. There are relational keys for sustaining hope in any situation, especially in the midst of our own doubts and feelings of inadequacy.

Chapter 6

Spiritual Keys for sustaining Hope

³⁵ Rima and McIntosh in *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* speak of the dark side as a natural result of human development ... the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion.”, 28.

³⁶ According to Henri Nouwen, the Incarnation is a great mystery. He writes in *Show Me the Way*, “God has descended to us human beings to become a human being with us, and once among us, descended to the total dereliction of one condemned to death ... Every fiber of our being rebels against it”, 19.

This chapter will focus on the importance of spiritual development and formation³⁷ for sustaining hope in the life of a minister. Living the God-directed life and ministry in Christ, which began with God when He formed us before we were born, is filled with wonder and awe. While this is true, it is also true that every minister daily goes into enemy territory, or as Bonhoeffer says, we live and serve “in the midst of our enemies”.³⁸ Following Christ means a willingness to give up whatever comfort we might enjoy, in order to be free and strong to go into a spiritually dark and fallen world.

This is what it means to follow Christ in an Incarnational way of life. Just as Jesus came to earth and humbled himself to the point of death on the cross to defeat our spiritual enemies, each one of us has a command from the Lord to follow the example of Christ. Only our sacrifice is to be “a living sacrifice”;³⁹ this is our reasonable service in view of all of the Lord’s mercies.

This means our spiritual enemies are not the people in our lives or in our churches. They are not in denominational headquarters or in the church meeting rooms. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”⁴⁰

³⁷ James Bryan Smith gives us a model for spiritual growth and development in his book, *The Good and Beautiful God*, which include the work of the Holy Spirit, through community, spiritual exercises, and the narratives of Christ, 24.

³⁸ Bonhoeffer, Dietrick. *Life Together*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 17.

³⁹Hodge, Charles D. D. *Commentary on The Epistle To the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972. Hodge says that believers present to the Lord “a sacrifice that lives ... The sacrifice then which we are to make is not a transient service, like the oblation of a victim, which was in a few moments consumed on the altar, but is a living or perpetual sacrifice, never to be neglected or recalled.”

⁴⁰ Ephesians 6:12 (NIV).

Since our struggle is primarily in spiritual realms, we will discuss a strategic plan for staying spiritually strong and fit for service in ways that help us appropriate God's free grace. We will show the importance of the faith community, spiritual practices, a renewed mind like the mind of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit for fulfilling our calling in enemy territory. In Philippians 2:5, the apostle Paul exhorts us to have the mind of Christ. His objective is not to give instruction in doctrine, but to reinforce instruction in Christian living. And he does this by appealing to the conduct of Christ."⁴¹ It is essential to consider spiritual habits for positioning yourself in the place to receive God's healing and grace to follow the example of Christ. This section will focus on spiritual self-care and spiritual development for sustaining our hope.

Chapter 7

Theological Keys for Sustaining Hope

This chapter will focus on the theological importance of the humanity of Christ and other theological issues and their significance for the Christian leader. Here the focus will include the significance of the atonement, the incarnation, the trinity, the sufferings and death of Christ, the resurrection, the mind of Christ, the mission of Christ, the hope of glory, the mystical union and more. The reader will be encouraged to consider a deeper meaning of "not I, but Christ," from Galatians 2:20 to discover the hope that is ours in the exchange of any form of darkness for Christ's light, our sorrows for Christ's joy, our weakness for Christ's strength and our despair for Christ's hope. It will be shown

⁴¹Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary, vol.43* ed. David A. Hubbard (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 79.

how all of this is made possible by the ministry of the Holy Spirit as an expression of love for every minister.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Here I will acknowledge the fears a minister may encounter in times of introspection and reflection necessary for Christ to take us deeper into an intimate and honest relationship with Him in order to experience His hope at a deeper level. It is somewhat like taking a roller coaster ride into the dark with heart-pounding twists and turns that can take your breath away, while at the same time thrilling the soul with a new rush of confidence and hope in Christ.

I will summarize the material in the previous chapters and will suggest to readers a new paradigm that is ultimately found in Christ alone. Rather than to bail out of ministry with feelings of inadequacy, grief, failure, and loss, pastors can find new grace to go on in the midst of incredible pressure and stress which seem never-ending. There is an answer for them, and all who consider themselves called to be ministers, as they REST in Christ, finding hope in ways that are **R**elational, **E**motional, **S**piritual, and **T**heological with life-giving hope and the ability to finish strong. Jesus said, “Come all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”⁴²

⁴² Matthew 11:28.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR HOPE IN MINISTRY

We who are privileged to serve in the ministry have great opportunities, as stewards of the gospel, to share a message of hope. However, there seems to be something very wrong when situations become so hopeless in our own lives and ministries that we give up and drop out of ministries in spite of the message of hope that is central to the Gospel. Let us examine the scriptures in order to discover a more realistic biblical perspective and find biblical keys for sustaining hope in ministry.

We will consider ways to reframe our perception of reality when there is confusion and uncertainty in the midst of ministry. We will look at the importance of being and remaining united with Christ in order to believe there is hope for us even in times of failure, suffering, and loss. Through it all, there is the promise of rest from our troubles in Christ.

I intend to show that just as Jesus suffered as a result of His presence in the world, times of suffering in our experience are important opportunities of ministry in people's lives. Situations that cause anxiety and despair may be the occasions to be instruments God's love and care, rather reasons for than times when we may feel abandoned as we face difficult challenges. We will address our hope in times of suffering in the following section.

Suffering Servants

A friend, who is a former Major League Baseball pitcher, tells how he went through a process of great loss and stress. Brian was drafted into the majors ahead of

Roger Clemens and played for several teams. As a starter and star for the Seattle Mariners, he was having a good season. He had also made a commitment of his life to Christ, when a shoulder injury occurred and abruptly ended his career. In addition, his youngest son had to have surgery to remove a cancerous tumor. Another son had been dealing with addictive behavior for years, and an adopted daughter was found to have leukemia at only eight years old.

Brian and his wife Jami spent many long days and nights in hospitals with their daughter, Kassidy, as this little girl fought a courageous battle with leukemia. They were deeply troubled by so much loss. How they handled their losses has become a dynamic witness to God's grace throughout the country, as they tell of the hope they have found in Christ to help them go on in the worst times of life. They are honest about how their faith was tested, and could only tell the Lord that they could not take much more stress and loss. Brian told a newspaper writer, "There are times when you pray, and you say, 'We're tired. We're worn out. We're exhausted.'"¹

I was made aware of their situation by someone in our church whose daughter went to school with Kassidy. They were especially troubled because Kassidy was getting worse and Christian friends were telling them that they could end all of their loss and Kassidy would get better if only they had greater faith. When I heard what they were being told, I dropped everything out of my schedule to go to them in the hospital where they were sitting with Kassidy.

Kassidy was blessed by their intense passion, their sacrificial presence, and their faith that God would sustain her and their whole family on a painful journey, which led

¹ Kelley, Scott. "One Tough Family." *The Seattle Times*, Dec.

her to be with the Lord by the time she was only ten years old. They thanked me many times in subsequent visits with them, saying that a new sense of hope made them feel as if a truckload of guilt was lifted off their shoulders. They still had tears and feelings of deep loss, but had new purpose and new hope, as they did all they could for her until she died about one year after our first visit in the hospital. They were truly suffering servants who lived by faith and were able to go on with hope in a unique ministry to others who were tempted to give up.

Their message and ministry actually deepened after Cassidy's death. They have been able to speak from the dark depths of personal loss and brokenness in ways which give them great credibility as they have spoken to religious and secular organizations throughout the country. As the Apostle Paul has said in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, it is "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."²

At those times when we may find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep our hope alive, we may be getting the preparation we need to help others who are on the verge of losing hope. "To experience God's comfort (i.e., help, consolation, and encouragement) in the midst of all one's affliction is to become indebted and equipped to communicate the divine comfort and sympathy to others who are in any kind of affliction or distress."³

² 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NASB).

³ Harris, Murry J. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10 ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 320.

We best comfort others with the same comfort we have received from the Lord. It is the kind of comfort that “comes to one’s side.”⁴

Ralph Earle says in v. 4 we are shown “why Christians, and especially ministers, must suffer. It is that they may comfort others by the comfort they themselves have received.”⁵ We are better equipped by the experiences when we have needed the Lord to come along with us, to know the importance and the way to come alongside others. In the ways the Lord has loved us in our time of need, we are to offer that same love to others, to come alongside and be a caring voice and a present help to them.

Brian is now listed as a speaker with the Ambassador’s Speakers Bureau and works as a regional manager for the Ron Blue Organization as a financial planner. In the midst of their brokenness, they share a message of hope in Christ who gives us the grace to not give up even in the worst moments of our lives. They demonstrate how we can always be living a life with hope in Christ, not in our own strength, but in His.

A challenge we face in ministry is trying to reconcile some principles we may have been taught while growing up. There are some ways we have heard the scriptures interpreted or taught that make us think the Lord is angry with us when we face troubling circumstances. The next section will consider how the way we may view God as an angry God could cause us to lose hope. A new view of God’s unconditional love may be an important key for sustaining hope in ministry.

⁴ Vine, W.E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. (Old Tappin, NJ : Flemming H. Revelle Company, 1966), 207.

⁵ Ralph Earle, Thd. *Word Meanings In The New Testament, vol. 4* (Grand Rapids: Baker book House, 1979), 106.

Is God Angry?

In order to sustain hope it is imperative to reframe the way we interpret the experiences of our lives according to the reliability of God's character as revealed in God's Word. Our definition of reality must be carefully and prayerfully based on the narrative of God's written word, which describes the Lord as a God of love and presents the realities of the Living Christ. In subtle ways, we may come to the conclusion that our struggles are based in God's judgment because so much of the teaching about God and our beliefs have focused on what James Bryan Smith calls an ancient false narrative of an angry God. This narrative says, "God is an angry judge. If you do well you will be blessed. If you sin you will be punished."⁶ According to J.B. Phillips some think of God like a "Resident Policeman", who can be made to appear as "an over-exacting tyrant",⁷ who will rule with guilt and makes us feel like a failure when we are not perfect.

I have known Jim Smith as a friend, instructor in spiritual formation, and colleague in ministry for about ten years. He, too, has experienced the tragic death of a child, which was born with a chromosomal disorder. One day a friend took Jim to lunch and asked, "Who sinned, Jim? Was it you or your wife? It had to be one of you."⁸ This experience led Smith into a search for the truth about God from the perspective which counts most. What were Jesus' teachings about the nature of God in relation to suffering?

⁶ Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful God - Falling In Love With the God Jesus Knows* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 41.

⁷ Phillips, J. B. *Your God Is Too Small*. (New York: Simon & Schuster), 1998.

⁸ Smith, Good and Beautiful God, 39.

His response can be instructive when He was asked explain why some Galileans suffered a horrible death.

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no!’ (Luke 13:1-3). “Jesus refuses to attribute tragedy (v.2) or accident (v.3) directly to one’s sin as the Jew’s did.”⁹

On another occasion when Jesus encountered a blind man, he was again asked if the blindness was a result of sin. Again, Jesus refused to affirm the teachings and beliefs of religious leaders. “As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?’

Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents.’”¹⁰

Thomas Merton understands the questions which linger into the night as we try to fit our reality into the will of any loving God.” Too often the conventional conception of ‘God’s will’ as a sphinx like and arbitrary force bearing down upon us with implacable hostility, leads men to lose faith in a God they cannot find it possible to love. Such a view of the divine will drives human weakness to despair and one wonders if it is not, itself, often the expression of despair too intolerable to be admitted to conscious

⁹ Liefield, Walter L. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 970.

¹⁰ John 9: 1-7.

consideration.”¹¹ Jewish thought “assumed that any physical illness or calamity was caused by someone’s wrongdoing”.¹²

Instead of affirming the teachings of Scribes and Pharisees based primarily on judgment and law, as well as the beliefs of so many of us, Jesus attempts to turn our hearts toward full acceptance of God’s plans and trust in Him. It is impossible for us to fully understand why God does what He does. We see only “through a glass darkly” now (1Corinthians 13:12). This phrase literally means that what we see is now “an enigma” to us, “compared with the direct vision in the presence of God hereafter.”¹³ It takes faith to be able to hope with certainty that one day all of God’s plans and God’s ways will be understood. “The riddles of seeming obscurity in life will all be made clear.”¹⁴ Until that day, our ability to sustain hope will require us to “walk by faith, and not by sight.”¹⁵

It may be that certainty is over-rated. This could be assumed when you read Scott Cairn in *The End of Suffering, Finding Purpose in Pain*. “Acknowledging our uncertainties in the face of perplexing circumstances may prove finally to be a very good thing, even something of a gift. More often than not these uncertainties can lead us into acknowledging, as well the point where human understanding fails—as it inevitably must do. And our noticing that point, can, thereafter, nudge us into realizing that the actual—

¹¹ Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1961), 15.

¹² L.Fredrikson, Roger. *The Communicator's Commentary*, vol.3 ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco: Word Books, Publisher), 1985.

¹³ Vine, Expository Dictionary, 18.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:7 Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.12, 548. “To the believer the Lord is present not to sight but to faith.”

the true—is immeasurably immense. Whatever the truth turns out to be, it is ever and always necessarily far more than we can ever know.”¹⁶

While we may not completely understand anything, this does not mean that we can be certain of nothing. We have the promise that Christ is always with us rather than abandons us (Revelation 3:21). He is, after all and at all times, “Immanuel”—which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). This reality is life-giving to us when we are most needing hope in the midst of our losses and loneliness. A minister may be lonely, but never alone based on the promised presence of God.

In addition, no matter how many times it might seem easier to give up, we have the hope of ultimate salvation, which is promised to all who believe in Him in the depths of trials here on earth. Peter wrote these words to encourage believers who were facing great times of trouble. There is a promise of something much more than what we must endure in this lifetime.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.¹⁷

This passage seems to be a call for every believer to lean into the future with faith, in order hold on to our hope.

Peter draws a sharp contrast in vv 6-9 between the present and the future. Christians are suffering now, but soon they will rejoice. They are

¹⁶ Cairns, Scott. *The End of Suffering - Finding Purpose In Pain*. Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2009, 102.

¹⁷ 1 Peter 1:6-9.

embattled now (guarded by the power of God v.5) but they will be victorious. Their faith is being tested now, but soon it will prove itself purer and more precious than gold. Whether they live through their trials or not, the final outcome of their faith will be salvation, with the praise, honor, and glory from God (v.7) that salvation brings.¹⁸

A few years later, in a time of solitude, Jim Smith wondered if it would have been better if his daughter Madeline had never been born, but was reminded that one day He and his family would all be with her in heaven. Jim came to a peaceful place of hope. “I was beginning to see how a person could face a tragedy and still say God is good to me ... and to know how Jesus could tremble and still call his Father ‘Abba.’”¹⁹ Later, when Jim and his wife, Meghan, were close to having their second baby girl, they lived with a lot of anxiety after their experience with Madeline. The second daughter was perfect, according to the doctor, and they named her “Hope.”

It Keeps Getting Better

Those who are justified by faith in God are able to experience God’s peace and spiritual growth through Christ, with hope even in our tribulations as is written in Romans 5:1-5:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope

¹⁸ Michaels, J. Ramsey. *Word Biblical Commentary, vol.49* eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W.Barker. (Columbia: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1988), 36.

¹⁹ Smith, Good and Beautiful God, 50.

does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.²⁰

In chapters 3 and 4 in the book of Romans, Paul has presented to us the hope we have in Christ of being justified. Each of us has the hope of “righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”²¹ In Christ, I am able to trust God for the forgiveness of sin. Because He paid the price on the cross for me, I am in a new relationship with God, no longer in a condition that kept me from experiencing His unconditional love. This “denotes nothing less than the judicial act of God, whereby man is pronounced free from guilt and punishment.”²² I no longer need to live in fear because of my sin or my inability to save myself. Relying on God’s grace and promises, I have hope, no matter what may be troubling in my life. This passage gives us a list of benefits that are ours, having been justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

We have peace with God. The way this verse is written, it seems to be saying that because we are justified, we have the gift of peace with God. At the same time, there is a degree of exhortation in the way it is written that might be an encouragement to us saying, “Let us keep on having or enjoying peace.”²³ For us who long for peace, there is

²⁰ Romans 5:1-5.

²¹ Romans 3:20-24.

²² Harrison, Everett F *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 10*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 42.

²³ Earle, Ralph. *Word Meanings in the New Testament*, vol. 3. (Grand Rapids: Baker book House, 1974), 96.

both an encouragement and an invitation “to enjoy the peace that God has given us in the forgiveness of our sins. We should refuse to let doubts or fears rob us of the precious heritage that is rightfully ours.”²⁴

When we are troubled by feelings of being unworthy of such forgiveness and grace, and we all are unworthy, we are given another reason for hope. Dr. Larry Day says, “We may be “unworthy” but God sees us as worthy because we are made in His image and likeness. God forgives because he sees us as worth forgiving.”²⁵ The divine act of God giving His Son for us shows us that He sees us as worth forgiving. As we begin to believe and move toward God with faith, the Lord creates an open door for us to enter into our new relationship with God, and not only that, he is like an escort for us into God’s presence and love. Christ becomes the payment of our spiritual debt for entrance into God’s grace. It is Christ “through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.”²⁶ “Christ is not only the door but also the One who stands there to welcome us in.”²⁷ It is the Lord himself who has opened the door and holds it open with an invitation to come by faith to find in Him a new way of life.

Instead of despair, “we exult in hope of the glory of God.” The Lord leads us out of the darkness of our emptiness, our troubled thoughts, and paralyzing fears into the hope of being present with the Lord, now and forever. In the glory of God, which is the

²⁴ Ibid., 96-97.

²⁵ Day, Dr.Larry. *Made In God's Image*. Image Bearers International, February 20, 2012.

²⁶ Romans 5:2.

²⁷ Earle, Word Meanings, vol.3, 97.

splendor of His presence,²⁸ we have hope now and one day that glory will be more fully realized and be ours forever. This glory is greater than all that may cause pain and heartache in our lives. “It is the Glory of the divine presence communicated to man (partially here, but) in full measure when he enters into that presence, man’s whole being will be transfigured by it.”²⁹

It is this promised new life that gives us a reason for joy in the midst of our sufferings. Because of God’s presence, His love and care, even now we are able to “exult in our tribulations.”³⁰ All that is ours in Christ does not end the present conflict with others, the long hard days, the feelings of inadequacy, and whatever makes us tremble with fear. The word for “suffering” is used for to describe “distress” in life.³¹

Such suffering is not without benefit and purpose. “It produces endurance, or steadfast endurance . . . it denotes a resistance to pressure, literally “a bearing up under it.”³² Suffering is never pleasant. It is not easy to take and may make it difficult to even function. However, if we take a step back and look at with a different view of reality, based on this scripture we might be able to see it as spiritual resistance training. The more we push against an immovable object, the stronger we become.

Victor Frankl wrote *Man’s Search for Meaning* to tell of lessons learned in Nazi death camps for spiritual survival. In it, he has said that we are more capable of surviving

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 97-98.

³⁰ Romans 5:3.

³¹ Harrison and Gaebelein, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 10, 57.

³² Harrison and Gaebelein, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 10, 57.

difficulties by finding real meaning in suffering. While we cannot control what happens to us, we can change ourselves, and the way we interpret sacrifice in ways that will enable us to endure trouble.

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation—just think of an incurable disease such as cancer—we are challenged to change ourselves.³³

We change ourselves, our attitude toward suffering, when we are able to believe that it is making us stronger. “On some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning ... that is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has meaning.”³⁴

The more we endure, the more we are capable of enduring. I could not run a quarter mile in track very fast until I had run two miles every day for several weeks. At first, I had nothing left when I began track practices in the early spring. Weeks later, I still did not run very fast, but I was no longer falling down in exhaustion when the race was over. In the trouble we find ourselves, we are becoming more fit for the Lord and fit for showing the Lord's reckless love for others.

This ability to bear trouble under pressure builds strength, strength of character. Paul continues to list the benefits for the one who is justified, saying, “tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character.”³⁵ This is a reference to “tested

³³ Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁵ Romans 5:3-4.

value.”³⁶ Job seemed to understand this process. At a time when he was losing one thing after another, he said something rather astonishing. With calm assurance in God’s unfailing love he said, “But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”³⁷

This Divine process leads us to genuine hope, not to more disappointment. It is not foolish longings and empty dreams. This hope in God does not lead us to be disgraced or “put to shame.”³⁸ It is hope that will sustain us in the midst of burnout in ministry. The reason this hope does not disappoint us is “because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”³⁹

God has given us the Holy Spirit to hold our hope steady.⁴⁰ Our limits to be able to go on are known completely by the Lord. His love is poured out in the measure we need and comes to us “in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ Our ability to have an intimate relationship with God allows us to experience a new way of life in ministry. “Just as our present access gives hope of sharing the divine glory, so with our sufferings. They help to produce character, and approved Christian character finds its

³⁶ Harrison and Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 57.

³⁷ Job 23:10.

³⁸ Earle, *Word Meanings*, vol. 3, 98.

³⁹ Romans 5:5.

⁴⁰ Earle, *Word Meanings Volume 3*, 98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

ultimate resting place in the presence of God, not in a grave.”⁴² The best is yet to come in Christ.

So let us turn to Jesus to discover what is real, when we begin to wonder if God can be trusted. “In all of His stories, Jesus describes a God who seems altogether good and is always out for our good, even if we cannot understand it.”⁴³ Jesus teaches us further about the unfailing love and care of the Father in Mathew 7:7-11.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!⁴⁴

The best you can ever hope for is found in Christ and in His way. In the Sermon on the Mount, The Lord is continually showing us a better way to live. Here He tells us how to receive the best gifts. “The best gifts, those advocated in the Sermon on the Mount are available to ‘everyone’ (v.8) who persistently asks, seeks, and knocks.”⁴⁵

In our limited understandings it is possible for us to imagine things about God that are simply contrary to what we know to be true, based on His Word. He cannot be absent and at the same time always present. He cannot turn His back on us because of our sin or failures. A new paradigm for hope can be based in part on the belief that God is never

⁴² Harrison and Gaebelien, Expositors Bible Commentary, vol. 10, 56.

⁴³ Smith, Good and Beautiful God, 42.

⁴⁴ Mathew 7:7-11.

⁴⁵ VanGemeren and Gaebelien, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 5, 186.

contrary to His own essence, which is always love. We now consider what that means for those looking for reasons to have hope.

God Is Never Contrary to His Own Essence

Chuck Conniry speaks of the genius of God who delights in the variety of our very different lives.

In every instance the details of our relationship with Jesus Christ coalesce perfectly with the contours of our respective stories... God meets every person in the living of his or her life. God and we, in fact, have never had separate journeys, as the Psalmist says so well, “O Lord you have searched me and you know me...Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I go from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths (some versions say “hell”) you are there” (Psalm 139: 1, 7, 8)⁴⁶.

God joins us in the living of our daily lives, no matter how messy they may be.

We have hope because we have the Lord himself with us. This was demonstrated by Christ when He left the glory of heaven to humbly come to earth long ago. Consider the implications of this in the “contours of our respective stories.” If we are never on separate journeys, then we can say with complete assurance, “He is here.” When feeling alone in the most frightening moments of our lives, He is here. Alone and facing a decision to withdraw life support, He is here. When I might not want to live any longer with the situation as it is, He is here with me. I find hope in the reality that “God is encountered in

⁴⁶Conniry, Charles J. *Soaring in the Spirit - Rediscovering Mystery in the Christian Life*. (Colorado Springs: Authentic Media, 2007), 11-12.

the immediacy of daily life.”⁴⁷ He is, and will always be, an “ever present help in time of need”⁴⁸.

In order to receive and experience the Lord’s present help, it is crucial for us to compensate for our inability to see things as they are. Since we know only “in part,” we need a way to be able to understand Him as He reveals to us His will. Such understanding comes to us as we present ourselves to Him completely, all that we are or hope to be. This is the focus of the next section.

Reframing Our Perception of Reality

Because of our limited understanding, there is a constant need to reframe the definition of our perception of reality. In order to sustain hope in ministry, our interpretation of reality must be based on what God tells us in His Word. One of the most important biblical keys for understanding the things of God at a deeper level and sustaining our hope in ministry is found in Romans 12:1-2. It outlines our reasonable response to God’s grace and mercy and tells each of us how to position ourselves spiritually to be able to rightly discern God’s truth and His will for our lives.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁸ Psalm 46:1 (KJV).

your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”⁴⁹

The way I understand what Paul is saying is as follows. Contrary to our occasional feelings that God cannot possibly love us as we are, God is merciful and worthy of our offerings of faith and continued loyalty. “Whereas the heathen are prone to sacrifice in order to obtain mercy, biblical faith teaches that the divine mercy provides the basis for sacrifice as the fitting response.”⁵⁰ Because of His mercy, we present ourselves to God rather than give up hope. In so doing we take an important necessary step to more fully know, or understand, what is going on with us, and the Lord, as we attempt to serve Him. Whatever the gratitude one might feel “for pardon, purity, and the sure prospect of eternal life, is called forth to secure its consecration to that God who is the author of all these mercies.”⁵¹

Rather than animals free from blemish being presented and devoted to God by priests in the Old Testament,⁵² we are to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. “The expression your bodies is perhaps nearly equivalent to yourselves ... that the whole man, body as well as soul, was to be devoted to the service of God.”⁵³ This is Paul’s way of saying that the sacrifices we make are of ourselves, all that we are. The implications of this will again be considered in later sections of this paper.

⁴⁹ Romans 12:1-2.

⁵⁰ Harris and Gaebelien, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 127.

⁵¹ Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, 383.

⁵² Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, 183.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Our sacrifice is to be a “living sacrifice.” “The word “living” may glance by way of contrast to the animal sacrifices of the OT, which when offered, no longer possessed life. This offering which can lead us into a deeper understanding of the Lord is to be “a sacrifice that lives . . . not a transient service, like the oblation of a victim, which was in a few moments consumed upon the altar, but it is a living or perpetual sacrifice never to be neglected or recalled.”⁵⁴

Conniry’s explanation of this passage is helpful, especially as a counter to the idea that we are to nearly kill ourselves in order to please the Lord or others in our ministry. “We offer ourselves intentionally and consciously (*logikos*). What we offer to God is everything that makes up our daily lives (*latreia*). In other words, we offer our bodies as living sacrifices by consciously appropriating everything we are and do—in the here-and-now moment of daily living—to the glory of God.”⁵⁵ In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson gives a clear and practical expression to what God is asking of us in this verse. “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” (Romans 12:1)⁵⁶ God wants something more than the animal offerings in the Jewish sacrificial system. Paul is “encouraging the idea of a different kind of community, marked by self-giving without an accompanying sacrificial cult.”⁵⁷ This community is to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 384.

⁵⁵ Conniry, *Soaring*, 172.

⁵⁶ Romans 12:1 Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message//Remix- The Bible in Contemporary Language*. (Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress), 2003.

⁵⁷ Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 717.

be characterized by the same sacrificial love for God and one another in our daily lives that we see and have received in Christ.

This presentation of ourselves to God in ways that are full of living devotion must be supported by the continual renewing of our minds according to Romans 12:2.⁵⁸ We live in an evil age that can wear us down with its constant pull toward conformity. We dwell “in this world for witness, but not for conformity to that which is a passing phenomenon.”⁵⁹

There is in this passage hope for understanding the deep things of God, while two processes are going on all the time: “a continual renunciation and renewal.”⁶⁰ It is when we are “transformed by the renewing of our minds” that “fundamental attitudes are changed and new perspectives are taken up.”⁶¹ Instead of thinking in ways that are conformed to the world’s cultural way of perceiving reality, we are able to “know the good and perfect will of God.” This is “the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgment at each given moment.”⁶²

When we present ourselves to the Lord and daily call upon the Him to renew our minds, we are able to experience real hope, for we face our most difficult times with a perspective that is formed by God as presented by Christ and His teachings. This spiritual perspective allows us to know God’s will as that which is “good and acceptable,” even on

⁵⁸ Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol.10, 128 “There is a shift in the tense of the verse (from the aorist “offer”) to the present tense, pointing up the necessity of continual vigilance.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol.10, 128.

⁶¹Dunn, James D. G. *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38. Waco: Word Books, 1988, 714.

⁶² Ibid.

our worst days in ministry. The presentation of ourselves to God in every circumstance creates an opening to God to receive His grace, and be renewed in our minds. In this submissive relationship with God, we are able to reframe our perspective of reality and experience the mystery, joy, and hope for a new way of life in ministry.

This matter of presenting ourselves to God leads us into difficult circumstances in ministry and everyday life with family, friends and others. It is necessary for us to rely on Christ in order to have His strength for the challenges we face.

Not I, But Christ In Me

There was a time when I was opposed by some people for presenting Christ in a way that was not in line with a small group in the church. They first argued about theology. Soon they complained that I should not be involved in any church business. Eventually they sent out a letter to all church attendees, hoping to gather support for a resignation request. Beyond this, they also made untrue accusations about others who supported my ministry there. It was all very painful and very distracting as I attempted to stay the course and perform my responsibilities with faith and the love of Christ even toward those who wanted me to leave.

After the church congregation affirmed its support of me and our statements of faith and practice, a couple who were the most vicious in their attacks of me both became very ill. They were both hospitalized, one after the other within a short period of time. When they were healthy they had stopped coming to the church, and I was told they were too angry with me to attend. When they were in the hospital with serious health problems, I was determined to show them the love of Christ. I visited them both at the

hospital, held their hands, and prayed for them to be healed and to experience God's loving care. Later, that same couple welcomed me into their home with warmth, friendliness, and respect that I had never seen in them prior to those visits in the hospital.

In that situation I came to realize that even in what seem to be hopeless problems with people, when I was willing to give up my pride and my control and seek the Lord's grace to love others unconditionally, He was able to do what I could not do alone. It was not in me, in my own strength, to love someone who seemed to truly hate me. However, Christ in me so touched this couple that they were never the same.

The Lord lifted me up to new hope from disappointment and loss in that relationship with the couple who once wanted nothing to do with me. We can be raised from disappointments we experience when people and things no longer satisfy our deepest needs. We can become mired in the longings for approval, status, and power. All of this means nothing when compared to all that is ours in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the topic of our next section.

Arise In Christ

I can identify with the Apostle Paul, who expresses his disappointment with the things that he thought were important, compared to the importance of knowing Christ more intimately. At times in my life, I have thought that doing more acts of service proved my love for the Lord and would lead to greater approval from both the Lord and his people. What I discovered was that so much business actually kept me from spending more time in communion with the Lord and his people, and I drifted off on my own in a

sea of isolation. Such disappointment can lead to feelings of hopelessness instead of the joy I was seeking in my work and accomplishments.

I find a more life-giving objective for my efforts, and energizing hope in the scripture that Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8-11: “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”⁶³

It may be that one of the most important keys to sustaining hope is to reconsider our objectives. In this passage “one sees immediately in this expression a fitting climax to Paul’s passionate willingness to treat everything as trash that would prevent him from achieving his objectives which is ‘to gain Christ,’ ‘to be found in Christ,’ and ‘to know Christ.’ ‘To know Christ,’ therefore, is the ultimate goal toward which the apostle sets the course of his life.”⁶⁴ In Paul’s case, he was ready to release all that gave him pride in life, for it was those things that were keeping him from knowing Christ. It is important for me to be aware of anything in my own life that can keep me from knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. Compared to what is ours in Christ, it is rightfully seen as complete loss.

⁶³ Philippians 3:8-11.

⁶⁴ Hawthorne and Hubbard, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, 143.

Knowing Christ for Paul was more than simply knowing about him. He knew about Him when he pursued His followers. The word used here for “know” most often has the focus of attention “upon the ideas of understanding, experience, and intimacy, even the intimacy of the sexual relationship in marriage.”⁶⁵

“When Paul speaks of his desire to know Christ he does not have in mind a mere intellectual knowledge about Christ ... Rather, he is thinking about a personal encounter with Christ that inaugurates a spiritual intimacy with Christ that is life-changing and on-going.”⁶⁶ This intimate relationship with Christ allows us to arise from our weakness and misguided ways to new life in the resurrection power of Christ.

Paul is not content merely to know Christ as a fact of history, but to know Him personally as the resurrected ever-living Lord of his life. And, the power he wishes to know is not something separable from him, but the power with which the risen Christ is endowed. He wishes to know Christ by the power he wields in virtue of his resurrection. He wishes to know Him alive and creatively at work to save him from himself, to transform him from bad to good, to propel him forward toward a life of service to others to inaugurate ‘newness of life,’ life in the Spirit, in a word, to resurrect him from death in sin to life in God, to quicken and stimulate his whole moral and spiritual being.⁶⁷

Paul speaks of this great promise in Romans 6:5-8. “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Hawthorne and Hubbard, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, 143.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 143-144.

who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”⁶⁸

In this passage, there are two ways to view the resurrection. Certainly, there is the hope for every believer in a bodily resurrection. “We will live with Him” assures us of victory over death in the future. Paul has the “future bodily resurrection in view.”⁶⁹ However, in verse 5, “it should be observed that Paul does not say that just as Christ was raised, so we too shall be raised. Instead he connects the resurrection of Christ with a new life for those who are His. And that life belongs to the present time.”⁷⁰ The resurrection in verse 5 is a reference to a spiritual resurrection—raised with Christ—as in Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 2:12, 3:1.”⁷¹

Here in Philippians 3 and in Romans 6 there is wonderful hope for us all. We have the hope that we may arise from suffering and death in Christ, both now and forever. Paul does assert, “The Christian died and rose with Christ and is now living in the power of Christ’s resurrected life. But this conviction does not cause him to surrender the hope of a future resurrection when all conflicts will be resolved, all ills be healed, all human frailties, both moral and physical, be eliminated, and all wrongs forever set right.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Romans 6:5-8.

⁶⁹ Harrison and Gaebelien, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 71.

⁷⁰ Harrison and Gaebelien, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 71.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 69.

⁷² Hawthorne and Hubbard, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol.43, 146.

The day is coming when our feelings of hopelessness will never again haunt us in our solitary moments of contemplation. In fact, the Lord has invited us to come to Him even now in order to experience His rest.

Conclusion: An Invitation to Rest

As we have said, an important key for sustaining hope is to believe that the Lord asks of each of us only that which is in keeping with His unfailing love. When our service involves suffering, it also leads us into the comfort of the Lord, which helps us in our ministry to comfort others. God is not angry and unforgiving but gives what is good to those who trust in Him, with infinite ability to use the troubles in our lives for His redemptive purposes. He has promised to never leave us and is always present, even when we do not feel it to be true. He cannot be contrary to His very essence, which is always and everywhere present. He cannot be unloving, for He is love at its best.

When the Lord calls us to present ourselves completely to Him, He is leading us to the place where we are able to understand His will to be “good and acceptable,” rather than a weight too heavy to be carried. When He leads us to unite with Him in His death, it is to lead us out of the darkness of sin and into the power of His resurrected life. When he draws us closer to himself and away from all that we thought would give us value and joy, He is taking us up out of the trash heap of empty achievements and success according to the world’s standards, and into His new way of life, out of despair and into the true hope that is ours in Him.

All that He asks of us is ultimately an invitation to experience His rest. There is rest for the weary as described by Jesus in Mathew 11:28. “Come to Me, all who are

weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁷³ “Jesus’ rest is a yoke of wisdom that unites persons with Himself. He offers rest, for He is not only the bearer of the wisdom of God, He is that Wisdom. Such rest ... is the singleness of relationship with Christ, the rest of knowing His provision as a completed salvation ... a joyous fellowship.”⁷⁴ His “yoke” leads us to rest and hope. In His invitation; He gently offers His followers in ministry this alternative way of doing our work. “Yoke yourself with me, for my task for you is shared and made easy and the burden is light.”⁷⁵ This is the “the sentient element in man, that by which he perceives, reflects, feels, desires.”⁷⁶ As we will see later in this paper, this promised rest in Christ is an important key for sustaining hope, hope that is relational, emotional, spiritual, and theological.

In the next section, we will consider the possibility of sustaining hope in difficult circumstances as we look at the lives of various historical figures. Throughout centuries of time, ministers have experienced troubles that may take away one’s joy. However, difficult times may also be useful as a means for deepening our faith, as well as increasing our dependence upon God and strengthening our hope.

⁷³ Matthew 11:28-29.

⁷⁴ Augsburg, Myron S., *The Communicator's Commentary*, vol.1 ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 150.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Vine, *An Expository Dictionary*, 54.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL KEYS TO SUSTAINING HOPE

In this section, I hope to show how ministers are not exempt from pain and suffering and the conditions which can lead to depression and feelings of hopelessness. In addition, we will consider historical examples of persons who faced similar experiences without losing hope. In doing so, we may discover more keys for sustaining hope in our own lives when trouble seems to close in and surround us on all sides. The trouble ministers face is often in isolation and behind closed doors.

Trouble Behind Closed Doors

According to research, ministers wrestle with low self-esteem, depression, and suicide at the same levels of the general population. In an article entitled “Depression Among Clergy Similar to Population,” Greg Warner reveals the real desperation he has discovered in his research with men and women in ministry:

No one knows for sure how many ministers suffer from depression—or how many attempt suicide. Even those who counsel depressed clergy don’t know those numbers.

“It’s like nailing Jell-O to the wall,” said H.B. London, vice president for pastoral ministry at Focus on the Family. But he offered an estimate, based on research and a decade of ministering to ministers, that 18 percent to 25 percent of all ministers are depressed at any one time.

Most counselors interviewed for this series agreed depression among clergy is at least as likely as in the general population. “I would venture to say it is as common among clergy as non-clergy,” said Matthew Stanford, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

And those numbers are staggering.

“The likelihood is that one out of every four pastors is depressed,” said Stanford, an evangelical Christian who studies the handling of mental illness in the Christian community.

Most counselors agree the majority of clergy depression goes unreported and untreated because of career fears, social stigma and spiritual taboo.

“Clergy do not talk about it because it violates their understanding of their faith,” said Steve Scoggin, president of CareNet, which provides pastoral counseling in 21 North Carolina centers. “They believe they are not supposed to have those kinds of thoughts.”¹

The passionate ministry of the Apostle Paul led him into trouble in Rome where he carried the weight of confinement to prison and to a prison guard, while he continued to minister to others who would come to him.² From this example of Paul, we learn that the Lord may lead a minister to a setting that feels like a prison. You may feel like you are chained to persons who hold you captive like a prison guard yet still be expected to influence for Christ. Rather than lose hope in what may feel like symptoms of burnout, take comfort that in such circumstances, the Lord has not only remained with you but is able to use you to minister in ways you may have never imagined.

It would serve us well to keep this in mind. While chained to a prison guard, Paul gave witness to obedient service amidst the throes of trouble. He speaks of “commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger ... as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”³ In terrible circumstances, God is still faithful and acts with love no matter what may be our very real losses, or unfair losses and no matter how unfair the injustices that all of us will endure at various times. This has been an important

¹ Warner, Greg. "Biblical Recorder." *Biblical Recorder Blog Post - Depression Among Clergy*. October 19, 2009. <http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/default.aspx> (accessed April 8, 2011).

² Acts 28:16-17.

³ 2 Corinthians 6.4-10.

truth for a young woman in ministry who felt as if every trusted source of love and support had abandoned her. Consider Christy's story of discovering the authentic love of God she needed in unexpected ways and unusual settings.

Spiritual Rhythms in Your Distress

A young evangelical female minister, in her twenties, seemed troubled when I entered the coffee shop where she was working part-time. She was tense and trembling, and with probing questions I discovered that she was living through a very dark period. She had been abused and abandoned by an insecure husband. In her distress, she was neglected, ignored, and rejected by denominational leaders. In addition, she was shunned by people in the church where she had been serving as a minister. Though brilliant, with advanced degrees in ministry and a gifted ability to communicate, she now lived in a shelter, without hope. Determined to help her see the love of Christ with flesh and blood, I prayed with her in the coffee shop and entered into a relationship of spiritual care for Christy for many months until now.

Recently, thinking of the spiritual rhythms and practices of Christ, (see his pattern in Luke 6) I asked Christy to describe her spiritual formation in the context of her darkness. How would she describe her relationship and time with God the Father? Since this was where Christ began His day, I asked how she would describe her relationship and time with God the Father. This is how she responded.

I would find myself in complete agony at night, moaning, almost throwing up my theological and emotional insides with the torment of my soul. I was never mad at God. It was not God's fault that people were so ignorant and stupid. It was the people's fault. And I can remember times where I

felt like I was inside the womb of God, safe from the evil of the world and the people who could not stand me.

I could not even pray in those moments. There were no words, only distress. But the cries of my heart were heard by God and I felt a strange peace although I was completely alone in those early days—the days before I even found a community who would love me for who I was.⁴

I also asked about her relationship to God’s people, the faith community. Christ spent time with followers after his time with the Father. Notice the pain in her words as she describes her reality within deep despair, as she looked to people who were supposed to be the body of Christ to her.

The church hated me so much; I can remember curling up in a ball and rocking back and forth. My world had completely fallen apart with their disgust for me and my call. I had nowhere to turn. The church, which ordained me, trained me for my calling, and sent me out, is the same church who rejected me in my lowest point. When I was ordained, the person leading said “endure affliction,” and his voice shook, and his eyes went sad. I had no idea what kind of affliction from that very community would be in store for me.

The church gossiped about me. They made fun of me, tore me down. Sometimes they would refuse to even make eye contact with me. It was as if I was not even a person; it was dehumanizing.

But there was another church body who found me in the midst of all this—a hodgepodge of people who had nothing in common with each other—and all of us found community at a coffee shop. They picked me up and believed in me, until I believed in myself again. They reminded me of my gifts, and refused to draw limits on their love for me. This is the church.⁵

As Christy shared her experience, I asked her to describe the effect all of this had on her ministry to others in her life. Christ turned toward ministry to others after His time with the Father and His followers. Christy shared these honest thoughts of giving up.

I almost gave up several times in the midst of the deep darkness. There was no point; my ministry had crashed so many times for reasons beyond

⁴ Sim, Christi, interview by Ben Staley. *Spiritual Rhythms In Desperate Times* (October 20, 2011).

⁵ Ibid.

my control. There was no reason to go on and continue. I was sick of trying to prove myself just so I could participate in ministry.

But then I found ministry in the least likely places. I was living in a domestic violence shelter (after already being rejected by the church both before I ran away and because of the divorce itself). Several women and I bound ourselves together and refused to let each other slip. I became the leader by default and was told many times, “if you give up, we give up too.” If that’s not ministry, I don’t know what is. It was not glamorous. No one knew about it, but none of those women went back to abusive relationships for the first time in their lives, and neither did I.

I also found ministry in a coffee shop—loving people and caring about people outside the church walls. These were unlikely places with the most unlikely people, but ministry nonetheless.⁶

Christy’s testimony gives evidence of someone in ministry who found hope in the Christ-like spiritual rhythms of her life in a time of deep despair. She was able to find hope and purpose in unlikely places, such as a coffee shop with strangers, as well as a shelter filled with victims and people who had little to give. The Lord met her there when she could not find help or hope in the familiar places she had relied on in the past. To remind her of God’s unfailing love I offered her words of encouragement at a table in the coffee shop.

With the following words I wanted her to hear the real love of God expressed in a language she could hear with her own ears, fully understand, and embrace as a reason for hope. As I held her hand, this is what I said.

Christy, hear the Lord say to you today, I love you with an everlasting love. Nothing will ever change that. I will never leave you. I will never walk out on you, reject you, or abuse you. You are mine. I have chosen you. I have a plan for your life to work out these troubles for some ultimate good, and to enhance your ministry. You can call on me anytime, and I will listen and respond with loving care. Your past does not ruin your potential for ministry, nor destroy your hopes for joy and happiness

⁶ Ibid.

in the future. I am your friend, one who sticks closer than a brother. Don't ever forget any of what I have just told you, not ever.

In a recent post on her Facebook site, Christy shared this note about her new place of ministry at a Christian college in the area. "Most religious folks seek to prove the other wrong and send the other to hell. This school pushes conversation with ALL to transform ourselves in the encounter of their beauty." In her dark experiences, Christy was able to find a new "beauty" in those who once would not have mattered much in her life.

"It is no secret that many of our clergy today are, in various ways, in trouble. The more sensational stories are picked up by the media. Many more men and women struggle privately, as they try to be faithful. And even those who are relatively healthy live with enormous stresses and burdens."⁷ Many of us are in need for new ways to face the challenges of ministry and new ways to think about the troubles of personal failure, confusion, humiliation, rejection, abandonment, and opposition in order to have hope and experience the deep love of God, which is found in Jesus Christ. Regardless of the reasons for what may feel like the worst times of our lives, we may be entering into the joy of discovering that God never fails nor forsakes us, and He can be found by us at times, wrapped within the context and experiences of our darkest hours.

In the next section, we will focus on lessons for us found in the experience and theology of the Apostle Paul.

⁷ Hands, Donald R. and Fehr, Wayne L. *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy*. (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1993), xix.

A New Way of Life In Ministry

The Apostle Paul shows a better way of life to stay focused and faithful in ministry, even in dark and desperate times. Paul is first introduced in Acts chapter 7 as one of those who witnessed the stoning of Stephen, when followers of Christ were being persecuted. “When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”⁸ Saul was a young Pharisee, who later became known as “Paul.” This reference to Saul suggests that he had some part in this execution.⁹ A “young man” in the Greek writings of the day would mean that Saul was between the ages of 24 and 40. The shift from “Saul” to “Paul” occurs in the biblical context where he came into contact with a Roman official (Acts 13:6-12).¹⁰ Paul’s dramatic encounter with Christ is recorded in Acts 9:1-7.

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He *said*, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”¹¹

⁸ Acts 7:58.

⁹ Longenecker, Richard N. *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 ed, by Gaebelein, Frank E. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 352.

¹⁰ Harrison and Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 14.

¹¹ Acts 9:1-7.

Before first being called Christians in Antioch (according to Acts 11:26), those who were believers in Christ as the Messiah and persecuted by Paul called themselves those of “the Way.”¹²

Imagine the implications of this for Paul.

Once Saul had been encountered by Christ on the Damascus road, a number of realizations must have begun to press in upon his consciousness. First, Saul began to understand that despite his zeal and his sense of doing God’s will, his previous life and activities in Judaism lay under God’s rebuke ... second, Saul could not escape the fact that Jesus whose followers he had been persecuting was alive, exalted, and in some manner associated with God the Father, whom Israel worshipped. He, therefore, had to revise his whole estimate of the life, teaching, and death of the Nazarene.¹³

Ultimately, if all of this is true then Paul “understood that he had a mission to carry out for Christ.”¹⁴

A disciple named Ananias had a vision in which the Lord spoke to him about helping Saul, which is recorded in Acts 9:10-15. Within that vision Ananias heard that he should go find Saul, the one who had persecuted followers of Christ, and pray for him to regain his sight. When Ananias expressed reservations about going to Saul, the Lord said that Saul was the Lord’s chosen instrument with a ministry that would take the message of Christ to “Gentiles, kings and sons of Israel.”¹⁵ Then the Lord said concerning His chosen one Saul, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”¹⁶

¹² Longenecker and Gaebelien, Expositors Bible Commentary, vol. 9, 370.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Acts 9:15.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Here you find in a few sentences an overview of what is to come in Paul's life as a missionary. Here there is a "theological précis" for what is portrayed historically in Paul's missionary journeys in Acts chapters 13-28, and also a summary of Paul's presentation of himself as reflected in his own letters in the New Testament.¹⁷

Since Paul was chosen of the Lord, and at the same time someone who did indeed suffer while carrying out his ministry, it is wise for us to learn what we can from him about a proper view of suffering, while trying to faithfully serve the Lord.

There is help for us who are in ministry to be found in Paul's writing about his experiences in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. The paradoxes found in this passage may lead us to greater acceptance, if not understanding, of the troubling circumstances that are able circumstances able to create tension in our lives, which can lead to burnout.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.¹⁸

In the opening comments of this passage, Paul is not saying that the human body is worthless or merely an empty vessel. Instead "he is contrasting the relative insignificance of the bearers of the light with the inestimable worth and beauty of the

¹⁷ Longenecker and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, 373.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

light itself. Behind this contrast Paul sees a divine purpose, that men may recognize that the all-surpassing power is God's alone."¹⁹

Some feelings of burnout may have something to do with too much concern about making a good impression on the right people at the right time. Failure to make a good impression can lead to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. According to Lynn Hough in the *Dignity of Man*, "The loss of assurance that man has been made in the divine image is one of the most tragic experiences which can come to man ... he is an orphan in the universe if he has lost the unique mark which God has made upon his life ... he is really whistling in the dark to keep up his courage ... he suffers constantly from and inner depletion of moral and spiritual vitality."²⁰

Keeping our focus on the assurance of being made in the image of God can help us overcome the temptation to rely on the approval of others to determine our self-worth. "The sense that God and man belong in one great bundle of life because God has given to man a certain likeness to Himself is one of the most transforming thoughts which can come to man ... Man fully aware that he was made in the divine image can face his universe. There are other problems. And some of them tragic enough. But this one matter settled, there is a sound basis for life."²¹

From the point that Paul is making here, the problem may be that I am more concerned about looking like a great success, than how others may view God's power and love. Paul's great concern is that God's great power is fully recognized by others.

¹⁹ Harris and Gaebelien, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 342.

²⁰ Hough, Lynn Harold. *The Dignity of Man*. (London: Independant Press, 1950), 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

More than looking for personal affirmation, it is important to keep our focus on what God is able to do in relatively simple, fragile, “jars of clay.” Paul is referring to “a piece of brittle, kiln-baked pottery”²² when he speaks of an earthen vessel. I carried a piece of this type of pottery all the way from Burundi, Africa to Kansas. I held it carefully on airplanes and through airports, and then broke it to pieces when I set it on a church pew at a mission’s presentation. Such baked clay breaks easily, when you may least expect it to happen.

Paul is saying that we are like that clay pot compared to the infinite power and strength of God. We can easily be broken, and yet God still uses us. “God’s power finds its full scope in human weakness.”²³ When the focus of our ministry is on presenting the goodness and greatness of God, He is able to use our own weakness to present the contrast which clearly demonstrates to others what God is able to do for and with all who will trust in Him.

In this passage there is a series of antitheses that go on to illustrate the weakness of a missionary, like Paul, in carrying out his ministry, and the power of God in meeting every need, even to the point of preserving his life and sustaining his spirit.²⁴

“Paul was ‘hard pressed on every side,’ but not completely cornered or without room for movement, driven to surrender. He was ‘bewildered ... but never at ... wits’ end’, or never totally at a loss. He was hounded by the foe, but not left to his mercy. He

²² Howard, Richard E. *Newness of Life*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 212.

²³ Harris and Gaebelien, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, .342.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

was knocked to the ground but not permanently ‘grounded.’”²⁵ In this testimony of Paul, we discover that the Lord always provides a way to go on no matter what a servant is forced to endure.

“As Paul faced the intense pressures and persecutions of early missionary life he marveled at how God preserved him, and likened his daily deliverance to an entering into the resurrection power of Jesus. This is how, in Christ, we may be “always dying but never lifeless.”²⁶ Howard Dunn refers to this passage as support for recognizing that salvation is “a continuing experience not only of life, but also of death. Sanctification is a dying as well as living. Death is at work in the believer as well as life ... divine power *in* human transience and corruptibility—not divine power obliterating or leaving behind human weakness, but *in* human weakness.”²⁷ This is what it means according to Paul’s theology of “life in the midst of death.”²⁸

Whether having a bad day or a long period of pain and sorrow, it might be good for us to contemplate the passage as it is summed up by Paul describing his experience of “being hard pressed,” “perplexed” “persecuted,” and “struck down” during the time of his faithful service for the Lord. “On the other hand, he uses the phrase ‘the life of Jesus’ to express the Lord’s saving him from being crushed, from despair, from abandonment, and from destruction, all of which prefigures the Christian’s final deliverance from mortality

²⁵Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, .342

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 482.

²⁸ Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 343.

at the resurrection.”²⁹ The deliverance we experience now in the trials of this present life is evidence of Christ’s resurrection power at work in our lives both now and forever.

A great promise comes to us through Paul in Romans 8:16 and, 17: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, - and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. For, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” One might say the worse living in this world seems to be, the better heaven must be, because “the troubles now cannot be compared with the glory coming to those who keep trusting even in the midst of dying. Sharing His sufferings may be looked at as simply the cost of discipleship ... weighed in the scales of true and lasting values, the sufferings endured in this life are light indeed, compared with the splendor of the life to come.”³⁰

Paul completes this passage by saying, “So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”³¹ There is a bigger picture for us to consider when we are going through difficult times and are filled with feelings of hopelessness and despair. There is a reason for to take heart in that “the power of God” is shown in the midst of our weakness as noted earlier. Beyond this in our suffering for the Lord, others are able to experience the love and life of Christ. “Outwardly, Paul’s missionary service seems a failing enterprise; death is relentlessly active in his person, robbing him of his power, but Paul counts this

²⁹ Ibid., 342.

³⁰ Gaebelien and Harrison, Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans vol. 10, 93.

³¹ 2 Corinthians 4:12.

disability worth it since his converts at Corinth are receiving the message of life that leads to life.”³²

In the search for hope in times of weakness, trouble, and loss, there is a path to new joy. This pathway to an experience of God’s mercy is discovered in the shepherd boy who became king, the Psalmist, David.

The Path to Forgiveness and New Joy

David, the Lord’s anointed king, was in a position of power over the people of Israel. The trouble he brought to himself, his family and his people is the same He brought trouble to himself, his family, and his people, the same. type of trouble we can get ourselves into when we allow ourselves to seek our own selfish gratification. When we have made such destructive choices, there is still hope in God’s mercy and His promised forgiveness. His love remains constant and he is able to lead us into a new way of life and joy in ministry. David shows us that we can find hope through acknowledging our weakness and taking responsibility for our actions.

In spite of all that he possessed, David still wanted something more, another man’s wife. 2 Samuel 12:1-27 tells how a prophet confronted David for his sexual relations with another man’s wife, Bathsheba. Nathan told David a story of a merciless rich man, who “had no pity,”³³ and asked what should be done to such a man. In David’s response, you can see how David had more concern for a poor man in Nathan’s story

³² Metzger, Bruce M. *Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 89.

³³ 2 Samuel 12:1-6 (RSV).

than he did for Uriah, whom he had killed. “His pity for the victim in the story is in stark contrast to his lack of pity for Uriah, his victim in real life.”³⁴

After David described how such a man should be punished, Nathan turned the conversation toward David’s sin with Bathsheba.

Nathan then said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!

‘Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.

‘Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’”³⁵

“It is clearly in his prophetic role that Nathan is sent by the Lord to present his convicting word to the king.”³⁶ When Nathan identified David as the culprit in the parable, he said, “You are the man!” J. Ian H. McDonald considers this to be “the most dramatic sentence in the Old Testament.”³⁷ In this parable, “it can be affirmed that David ... is shown to be a rich oppressor whose dynasty has sprung from an adulterously begun union.”³⁸ “Nathan’s abrupt application draws a parallel between the rich man’s

³⁴Madwig, Donald H. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 942.

³⁵ 2 Samuel 12:7-10.

³⁶ Madwig and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, 941.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 943.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

exploitation of the poor on account of his superior status and the king's misuse of his own authority."³⁹

David is in deep trouble due to his own foolish choices. When we are backed into a corner, facing serious consequences of our own behavior, the best way to respond is to take full responsibility and humbly call upon the Lord for his mercy and forgiveness. In this way, we discover a path out of feelings of hopelessness to the peace of God and the joy of His forgiveness.

In this passage, David has given us an example to follow when he was confronted about the way he used Bathsheba and took the life of her husband, Uriah, who was a threat to him. He immediately and humbly confessed it and sought the Lord's forgiveness. "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has taken away your sin.'"⁴⁰

"Though he could have vacillated or indignantly denied Nathan's accusation or ridded himself of Nathan in one way or another, David accepts full responsibility for his actions. In his total and immediate response of repentance ... there is no hint in the narrative that this is anything less than an authentic, rightly intentioned confession."⁴¹ Confession and complete dependence upon God's mercy and grace is a far better alternative in the midst of failure than giving up hope of ever being of any use to the Lord. Beyond the passage in 2 Samuel 12, there are more reasons for hope in the Lord's mercy and forgiveness in Psalm 51. This psalm is given the title "A Psalm of David,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ 2 Samuel 12:13

⁴¹ Madwig and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3. 946.

when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”⁴² “The verse is concerned to set the psalm in the context of Nathan’s confrontation with David after the arranged death of Uriah and the birth of a child to Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-14).”⁴³

In this psalm there is modeled for us both the type of prayer and the spirit in which we are to come before the Lord, when we are in need of forgiveness and a reason for hope in the midst of discovering how fully capable we are of doing the unthinkable when we seek to gratify our own self-centered desires.

Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your unfailing love;
 according to your great compassion
 blot out my transgressions.
 Wash away all my iniquity
 and cleanse me from my sin.
 For I know my transgressions,
 and my sin is always before me.
 Against you, you only, have I sinned
 and done what is evil in your sight;
 so you are right in your verdict
 and justified when you judge.
 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time
 my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness
 even in the womb;
 you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
 wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
 Let me hear joy and gladness;
 let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
 Hide your face from my sins
 and blot out all my iniquity.
 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
 and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

⁴² Psalm 51. Title given in the heading of the passage of NASB version.

⁴³ Tate, Marvin E. *Word Bible Commentary :Psalms 51-100*. ed. vol. 20. (Dallas:Word Books, 1990), 12. This does not give absolute proof that David composed this psalm. “The historical note is a way of saying that the understanding of the psalm is helped when read in a particular context. The literary composition of the psalm is largely irrelevant ... but the authority of the psalm as a Davidic psalm is enhanced by the historical note.”

Do not cast me from your presence
 or take your Holy Spirit from me.
 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
 and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
 so that sinners will turn back to you.”⁴⁴

In this prayer, the psalmist “appeals for mercy on the basis of God’s willingly assumed and continued obligation (his ‘loyal love’) to act for the removal of anything, including guilt, which threatens the welfare of an individual (or people) for whom he is responsible.”⁴⁵ Such a request for mercy in the first verse cannot be demanded, but “it can be asked for on the basis of the confession and prayer which follows.”⁴⁶

In those times when our feelings of hopelessness are rooted in our own destructive behavior that clearly goes against the Lord’s wishes, we are able to find in this passage a path to the place of God’s forgiveness and grace. Through prayer and confession, we are able to find new joy and hope. Whatever we may feel we have lost, that loss never includes the presence of God, who loves us with an everlasting love. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us, as we continue to trust and hope in His promised care.

It is important to come to the Lord with a humble and submissive attitude. The psalmist gives us a model for the way to approach the Lord in Psalm 51:16, 17: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not

⁴⁴ Psalm 51:1-13 (NIV).

⁴⁵ Tate, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20, 13.

⁴⁶Ibid.

despise.”⁴⁷ “The merciful action of God will not be received on the basis of sacrifice alone. The sacrifice sure to be accepted is that of a broken and contrite heart.”⁴⁸

The words used here indicate “a joyful expression, an exuberant cry.”⁴⁹ This disposition is very different from where the psalmist began when he begged for the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness. You can see new hope in his heart, based on God’s merciful forgiveness and His unfailing love. This is the way for us to find hope in the midst of moral failure, when the darkest hours are the result of our own actions.

Bonhoeffer Keys For Sustaining Hope - Community and Confession

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in East Germany in 1906, and grew up in Berlin. His father, a leading psychiatrist in Germany taught Bonhoeffer the characteristics of insistent realism,

For him Christianity could never be merely intellectual theory, doctrine divorced from life, or mystical emotion, but always it must be responsible, obedient action, the discipleship of Christ in every situation of concrete everyday life, personal and public. And it was this that led him in the end to prison and death. Six years before his imprisonment by the Gestapo he had written, ‘When Christ call a man, he bids him come and die’.⁵⁰

Bonhoeffer studied theology under great Berlin scholars including Holl, Seiber, Lietzman and also attended sessions with Karl Barth. “At the age of twenty-one he presented his doctor’s thesis, a dogmatic study of the communion of the saints, and in his

⁴⁷ Psalm 51:16-17 (NIV).

⁴⁸ Tate, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20, 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 8.

later inaugural dissertation, ‘Act and Being,’ he defined the position and significance of dialectal theology.”⁵¹

When Hitler took control of Germany in 1933, Bonhoeffer was critical of the German people who would follow such a leader, and “refused to have any part in the ‘German-Christian’ compromise with the Nazi government.”⁵² Bonhoeffer left Germany to accept a call to pastor two German congregations in London.

Bonhoeffer later accepted a call to go back to Germany to lead an illegal clandestine seminary for training young pastors in 1935.

He shared a common life in emergency-built houses with twenty-five vicars. This was life together, the life of the Christian community which is described and documented with Biblical insights in the book *Gemeinsames Leben* (1938) (Life Together) ... In this period he also wrote *Nachfolge*, published in England and the United States as *The Cost of Discipleship*. These two works are the distillation of his fundamental message – What it means to live with Christ.⁵³

The underground seminary was eventually closed by the Gestapo, but Bonhoeffer had already become involved in the events of his country which was dominated by a dictator.

The man who felt all the force of the pacifist position and weighed the ‘cost of discipleship’ concluded in the depths of his soul that to withdraw from those who were participating in the political and military resistance would be irresponsible cowardice and flight from reality ... he could see no possibility of retreat into any sinless, righteous, pious refuge. The sin of respectable people reveals itself in flight from responsibility. He saw that sin falling upon him and took his stand.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Ibid., 10.

⁵³ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

In April 1943, Bonhoeffer was arrested, with his sister Christel and her husband, Hans von Dohnant. They were taken to a military prison and remained there until October 8, 1944. During his time there, the prison guards were friendly to Bonhoeffer. They took him to the cells of troubled prisoners to minister them, preserved his writings, and established a courier service to the family and friends outside.

Ultimately, Bonhoeffer was transferred from one prison to another for security and all ties to the outside world were severed. He spent his last weeks with men and women of many nationalities, including Russians, Frenchmen, Italians and Germans. An English officer wrote these words regarding Bonhoeffer's last days.

He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near ... On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Pastor Bonhoeffer conducted a little service of worship and spoke to us in a way that went to the heart of all of us. He had hardly ended his last prayer when the door opened and two civilians entered. They said, 'Prisoner Bonhoeffer, come with us.' That had only one meaning for all prisoners- the gallows. We said good-bye to him. He took me aside: 'This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life.' The next day he was hanged in Flossenbug.⁵⁵

Joy and Strength in Community

Bonhoeffer found joy and strength during times of incredible pressure in Christian fellowship. He said, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer."⁵⁶ This gives many of us a new perspective on the way we view our congregations. It is easy to consider the people to whom we minister and share ministry as being the source of much of our frustration and stress.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

Bonhoeffer says that is easy to forget that our fellowship is a true gift from God. From the loneliness of a prison cell, Bonhoeffer reminds us of the importance of being together in the fellowship of Christian brethren.” It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed ... it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”⁵⁷

The determining factor for a community that is life-giving is found only in Jesus Christ. “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this ... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁸ It is Christ coming to us through the Christian community that gives us hope, and sustains us when we are tempted to give up.

When we are looking for a word of encouragement or direction from the Lord, He is able to pass it on to us through a brother or sister in Christ.

God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word in him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain or discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation.⁵⁹

God blesses us through those in our fellowship, and we are responsible for returning the love and support. “What God did to us, we then owed to others ... thus God

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 23.

Himself taught us to meet one another as God has met us in Christ ... Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us.”⁶⁰

We know that in reality, there are many who come into a fellowship with motives that are not out of a concern for others or about seeking Christ within the fellowship. Bonhoeffer notes that some come looking for only “some extraordinary social experience which he has not found elsewhere.”⁶¹ Such impure motives and wishful thinking can create a great danger of poisoning the brotherhood and creating confusion. Bonhoeffer says that it must be clear right from the beginning, “first that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality.”⁶²

Given the realities of all that is ours in Christian fellowship, that Christ has been laid down as the foundation and has bound us together in one body, we have reason to be thankful for the community that is ours in Christ. I admit, the people around me have not always seen me as a model of praise for the people in our fellowship.

Bonhoeffer challenges us all on this matter of being more thankful for those in our community.

We thank God for what He has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, by His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us, we rather thank God for what He does give us daily. And is not what has been given us enough: brothers who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of His Grace?⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁶¹ Ibid., 26.

⁶² Ibid., 26.

⁶³ Ibid., 28.

Coming from someone writing these words from a prison cell and living in the shadow of death at any moment, I find no excuse for anything less than a thankful heart, even if facing the debilitating realities of burnout in ministry.

Christian community can be helpful in finding a way of escape from the feelings of burnout, in that the people in our fellowship bring Christ to us in their care, their council, as well as their compassion. They bring to us the word, both written and Living that help us remember God's promises and experience His grace. For all of this we have good reasons to be thankful and less discouraged. Like community, confession is also a way that we are able to draw nearer to Christ, and be set free from sin's grip. This is the focus of our next section as we reflect on important keys from Bonhoeffer for sustaining hope in the midst of burnout.

The Power of Confession

In spiritual preparation for the first Eucharist at the seminary, Bonhoeffer reflected in morning and evening services with his students on the importance of reconciliation as a prerequisite for the celebration of communion. Surprising to most of the students was his request that each of them might make confessions privately to one of the other students or to him personally. "Hardly anyone could bring himself to do this and the atmosphere was somewhat embarrassed and resentful, since that kind of thing was not done in the Protestant church ... Bonhoeffer suspended all work for the rest of the day, suggesting instead that they should go for a walk."⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer - A Biography, Revised Edition*. Edited by Victoria J. Barnett. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 465.

In *The Transparent Self*, by Sidney Jourard, you discover how valuable confession in the sense of transparency can be for a healthy community. The outcomes of disclosing our real selves to one another are these: We learn the extent to which we are similar, one to the other, and the extent to which we differ from one another in thoughts, feelings, hopes, reactions to the past, etc. We also learn of the other person's needs, enabling us to help one another. In addition, we learn the extent to which a person is in accordance or deviates from moral and ethical standards.⁶⁵

It would take most of us in ministry much more than a walk to reach any level of comfort in confessing our sins and faults to someone, no matter how privately it could be done. "Self-disclosure, however, requires courage. Not solely the courage to be ... but the courage to be known, to be perceived by others as one knows himself to be."⁶⁶ The fact that this is hard for most of us reveals at least one problem we all wrestle with on a daily basis. We are all sinners. We all have sin to confess and need forgiveness.

Confession may be the path we need to finally come to grips with the realities we know about ourselves, and be better equipped to move into the future free from the hold our faults and failures have had on us. "When a person has been able to disclose himself utterly to another person, he learns how to increase his contact with his real self, and he may then be better able to direct his destiny on the basis of this knowledge."⁶⁷

As the weeks went on, one student after another began to go to one another for private confession. Those who went, and how often they went was not generally

⁶⁵ Jourard, Sidney M. *The Transparent Self*. (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company), 1971, 5.

⁶⁶Ibid., 5-6.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

discussed. “Then one day Bonhoeffer himself asked one of the brothers—one who was quite experienced in such matters—to hear his confession. Bonhoeffer did not lay down any liturgical form for this procedure ... without vestment or formal ceremony.”⁶⁸

According to Bonhoeffer, sin has a way of keeping us in isolation. “In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community ... sin wants to remain unknown.”⁶⁹

If community is an important context, where we appropriate God’s grace, then we must be concerned about any barriers that could keep us from enjoying the blessing of Christian fellowship. “The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin, it can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God.”⁷⁰

Bonhoeffer is not calling for a public confession from a parade of sinners. Instead he encourages such confession to be between two Christians. Bonhoeffer says, “I meet the whole congregation in the one brother to whom I confess my sins and forgives my sins ... in this matter no one acts in his own name nor by his own authority, but by the commission of Jesus Christ.”⁷¹

In confession, we also move toward the cross of Christ. There is according to Bonhoeffer, a profound kind of humiliation ... “in confession of concrete sins the old man dies a painful and shameful death before the eyes of a brother ... in confession we

⁶⁸ Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 465.

⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

break through to the true fellowship of the Cross of Jesus Christ.”⁷² This level of transparency will lead us out of the things that keep us bound and broken to new life in the mercy and forgiveness found in the love of God through Christ.

Confession also has the potential to lead us out of self-deception. God gives us certainty through our brother. “As the open confession of my sin to a brother insures me against self-deception, so, too, the assurance of forgiveness becomes fully certain to me only when it is spoken by a brother in the name of God.”⁷³

It is difficult for most of us to confess our sins to anyone. There was a time when it was made clear to me by the Spirit’s conviction that I had been judging the motives of a brother who held a different position on a church matter. I asked the Lord to forgive me, and I have no doubt that he did. However, I was sure that my attitude had affected the way I related to that brother in the meeting. There was no doubt that the Lord would be pleased if I would simply and humbly, apologize to the brother and ask his forgiveness for questioning his motives. It was not easy because of my pride, but I knew that it was necessary to be obedient to the Lord and to be in right relationship with my brother in Christ. I took time when we were alone away from the meeting to apologize and ask his forgiveness, and our relationship was stronger after that experience. He simply forgave me, and we went on with a healthier relationship for the remaining years of my ministry at that church.

“Who can hear our confession? He who himself lives beneath the Cross.

Wherever the message concerning the Crucified is a vital, living thing, there brotherly

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 116.

confession will also avail.”⁷⁴ Where the merciful message of the cross is shared with authenticity in the fellowship, there will also be a level of forgiveness and love that allows us to break through our fears and failure to new hope and peace through Christ and His people.

Conclusion

Looking back over time, voices and experiences in history have shown us that there are good reasons for sustaining hope in the darkest hours of our lives. When it feels like your life has our lives have become a nightmare within a dark night, you we can discover hope in surprising places and from unexpected people who come into our lives, as we follow the spiritual rhythms of Christ.

In the midst of great adversity and fierce opposition, we can live out a ministry that is according to God’s purposes in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings and in the power of His resurrection. We can claim life in the midst of dying. With such hope, a demonstration of faithfulness can bring great praise to God and inspire others to stay the course with faith in God’s grace, trusting in Christ’s power and love.

Our world may feel like hell, in the sense that it seems distant from the Father and His people as a result of destructive behavior and choices that lead to ruined lives. The pain we may cause others and in your experience may feel almost impossible to endure. Yet, you may be purified by the heat of your trials in ways that can allow you to come forth as fine gold. Your willingness to assume responsibility, seek God’s forgiveness,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 119.

rely on God's grace, and submit to God's loving discipline will renew your strength and restore your joy.

In any case, you are never beyond the grasp of a loving God, who created you and will not allow you to be tried beyond what you are able to bear. "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."⁷⁵ This passage gives us hope. "God is right there with us to keep us from being overwhelmed ... He will provide a way out, not to avoid the temptation, but to meet it successfully and to stand firm under it."⁷⁶

How is it possible for you to conduct yourself in dark times when it feels like you are in spiritual quicksand? With every move, it seems you sink a little deeper into the night of your troubled life. The Psalmist, at an anxious time in his life, heard this simple yet challenging admonition from the Lord: "Be still" (Psalm 46:10). This is possible with God's grace to help us overcome our weaknesses, stress, and fears.

Knowing the love of God and His commitment to care for us at all times and in every experience may be all that we have as a resource to survive. In Christ, it is enough. In Him, we find hope in the midst of burnout and a new way of life.

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV).

⁷⁶ Harris and Gaebelein *The Expositor's Bible Commentar*, vol.10, 250.

CHAPTER 4

RELATIONAL KEYS FOR SUSTAINING HOPE

Introduction

The following testimony presents a painful example of why so many ministers find it difficult, if not impossible, to move deeper into relationships with people. My friend, John, was damaged as a pastor. He was hurt deeply by the people he was supposed to love “as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25). As you read his story below, you discover how important it is for ministers to discover transforming, relational keys within a supportive community for sustaining hope in ministry. This is the topic of this chapter.

From the beginning to nearly the end, I believed solidly in God’s call to ministry. Being ordained by my faith tradition indicates the conviction of the leadership in my calling as well. I loved being a pastor and I matured in my relationship with God and from my interactions with people. I made plenty of mistakes and, yet, God’s Spirit strengthened me to learn from them. Over the twenty years of being in the pastorate, God had molded me into an instrument He could use.

In my last congregation of 750 members, we went through some heart-wrenching times. Two moral failures, one involving a staff member, and another a prominent family member, prompted the departure of 100 members and a decline in financial giving. For nearly two years I persevered through these discouraging times. Thinking it would be beneficial, I asked my superiors for a sabbatical: instead, it was suggested that I quit.

I had weathered some bad storms – the skies were clearing – this was no time to give up. A suggested alternative was to use a seasoned counselor who had helped many pastors over the last 20 years. After 15 months of intense counseling, I learned that one of my superiors had been conferring over this time with my counselor. It was not that I had anything to hide but the cloak of deception that broke my own spirit. Consequently,

I lost all confidence in my leaders and my own perspective of God's calling.

To this day (eight years later), I am clueless about the issues my denominational leaders had against me. Rather than open communication, they participated in an underhanded, devious scheme of using a professional counselor to persuade me to abandon God's call. They still believe they did nothing wrong. *It is my clear conviction, though, that my brother in Christ would never engage in such practices.*"¹

In trying to keep strong enough to endure the challenges of ministry, it is a temptation for ministers to keep, or at least allow, distance between them and other people. At the same time, it seems that forces of evil work all the angles to trouble ministers in relationships, often drawing men and women into isolation and despair. In such isolation, there is only an illusion of peace and safety. In desperate solitary moments, when all hope of experiencing life-giving community is gone, ministers are forced to make a choice. "Either we can live as unique members of a connected community, experiencing the fruit of Christ's life within us, or we can live as terrified, demanding, self-absorbed islands, disconnected from community and desperately determined to get by with whatever resources we brought to our island with us."²

David Seamands gives us insights regarding the way our damaged emotions can be used against us in spiritual warfare.

Satan uses your nagging sense of inferiority and inadequacy to isolate you. For the commonest way to cope with feelings of inferiority is to pull within yourself, to have little contact with other people as you possibly can, and just occasionally to peek out as the rest of the world goes by ... You are able to give to others only when you have a proper and healthy opinion of yourself. When you devalue yourself, you become overly

¹ M., John, interview by Ben Staley. *Betrayal Within The Faith Community* (March 18, 2009).

² Crabb, Larry. *Connecting: Healing For Ourselves and Our Relationships*. (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005), 31.

absorbed in and with yourself, and you don't have anything left over to give to others.³

Disappointing pain in relationships, and our own fear in relationships with others, both have the potential to drive clergy away from what they once thought was a clear calling into ministry. "We pastors are nearly drowned in the torrent of downgrading that pours over us in excuses for not doing God's work," writes David Seamands.⁴ Throughout the scriptures you see how God uses imperfect people with various shortcomings and infirmities, gives them work to do and then keeps His promise to supply us all with sufficient grace to do whatever He asks. "The trouble is that your low self-esteem robs God of marvelous opportunities to show off His perfection. Nothing sabotages Christian service more than thinking so little of yourself that you never really give God a chance."⁵

David Seamands suggests we take our self esteem from God, asking ourselves very important questions in order to begin to experience healing for low self-esteem.⁶

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God loves so deeply?
- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God has honored so highly? (1 John 3:1)
- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God values so highly? (Romans 5:7,8)
- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God has provided for so fully? (Matthew 7:11)
- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God has planned for so carefully? (Ephesians 1:3-5)

³Seamands, David A. *Healing for Damaged Emotions*. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1981), 52-53.

⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁶ Ibid., 72-73.

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone in whom God delights? (Ephesians 1: 6)

Most of us within our fellowships struggle with insecurity and low self-esteem.

Bonhoeffer tells us that it is also within the context of our fellowship with believers that we are enabled to deal with such disillusionment, “with all its unhappy and ugly aspects,” and face the truth in our mutual strength.⁷

Overcoming Fears Within Our Relationships

A headline caught my attention recently in our local newspaper that said, “NASA Attempts to Unstick Mars. Rover.”⁸ The Mars rover called *The Spirit* was launched several years ago with the intent to retrieve data from the surface of Mars. It was only expected to be able to function for around 90 days, but a team of scientists from the Jet Propulsion Lab in California has been able to reprogram it each time it has faced a new source of trouble. Now its wheels are stuck in a sandy soil, and it is unable to go any further to fulfill its mission. The hope of the team of scientists is that by sending it a new plan and new commands, it will be able to make necessary adjustments and be freed from whatever is holding it in a debilitating grip. With a new plan and new commands, *The Spirit* will be able to move freely and continue its important mission.

Like the Mars rover, the church where I pastor, has sometimes become stuck in the loose soil of isolation. At times we have struggled with maintaining authentic love,

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27.

⁸Johnson, John. "NASA Has Plan to Unstick Mars Rover." *Wichita Eagle*, November 13, 2009: 1. This article can also be found on line at <http://www.kansas.com/2009/11/13/1053104/nasa-has-plan-to-unstick-mars.html>.

love that is less calculating and more reckless; we were tempted to accept service, financial support, and business as substitutes for community, which would leave us empty, despite many reasons to celebrate what the Lord has done in spite of our flaws. We have found ourselves like the Mars rover, needing a new plan and a set of new commands that would transform us and set us free. The new plan and new commands for overcoming our fears of community at a deeper level must originate in Christ himself. “Jesus is our primary model of mission, and the Gospels are our primary texts... a historic person who represents the principal model for mission, ministry, and discipleship, and the focal point of an authentic New Testament faith.”⁹

In *Building A Bridge As You Walk on It - A guide for leading deep Change*, Robert Quinn says, “It is normal for people in organizations to say one thing while believing another.”¹⁰ With this understanding, it is clear that the church where I am the Lead Pastor, has found itself in the “normal” grip of individual isolation regarding commitments to going deeper relationally with the Lord and with one another. As a result, we are discovering that unless we submit ourselves completely to the Lord and to one another, we will remain stuck in the deep sands of what Frost and Hirsch call “a Christendom mode”.¹¹

While we say we believe completely in a missional model which is incarnational, messianic, and apostolic, we have come to the place where we tend to be attractional,

⁹ Frost, Michael, and Hirsch, Alan. *The Shaping of things to come: Innovation & Mission for the 21st-Century*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers., 2003), 112.

¹⁰ Quinn, Robert E. *Building the Bridge As you Walk On It : A Guide For Leading Change*. (San Francisco: Josse-Bass, 2004), 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

dualistic, and hierarchial.¹² This leads into a state of what Quinn calls “entropy,” a measure of disorder or a measure of the energy in a system that is not available for productive work. In essence, all closed systems tend to break down.”¹³ This is due to “our unwillingness to be more like Christ and engage in meaningful ways with one another and those who are “not-yet Christians.”¹⁴ In our human condition, we are broken and afraid to take risks which may cause discomfort or the pain of rejection (See Appendix A regarding healthy and unhealthy church situations where we may be more afraid to take risks).

Because of such fears, we reject Christ’s call to love others as He has loved us in ways that may make us vulnerable to suffer as He suffered. Such distance actually causes us to miss the joy and power of the present Christ who comes to us, according to Henry Nouwen, through “the life of the Christian community.”¹⁵ Nouwen goes on to say, “It is in the Christian community that we can be open and receptive to the suffering of the world and offer it a compassionate response.”¹⁶ The very suffering we seek to avoid in isolation, is able to make us more useful to the Lord in responding to the suffering in the world around us.

¹² Frost and Hirsch,. *Shaping of things to Come*, 30.

¹³ Quinn, *Building the Bridge As you Walk On It*, 18.

¹⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of things to Come*, 24.

¹⁵ Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Compassion-A Reflection on the Christian Life*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Danger Zone

When I began serving in this church in 1990, the congregation had been without a pastor for over one year. It had been led by a management team with a diverse group of leaders. This group consisted of men and women with spiritual depth, integrity, love for the church and others. They possessed ministry skills with an emphasis on shepherding care for our members and good vision for reaching out to others with the love of Christ to meet the needs of people inside and outside of the church. With good intentions, it was our hope to function in an incarnational mode, which is like “a web of networks of relationships, friendships, and acquaintances of which church members are a part.”¹⁷ Still, we are in need of God’s grace to help us overcome who we are, who we want others to be, and who others want us to be.

I had been in pastoral ministry for 20 years with strengths in pastoral care and experience in connecting with people inside and outside the church. My presence in the position of Senior Pastor was a welcome relief in 1990, since the people had carried the load of ministry themselves while most also worked secular jobs. There was a good match of my strengths and their needs, my passions and their expectations. As I had come from a stressful experience in church planting, both the people and I were glad for increased stability in our lives and in our church, with increased comfort and confidence with each passing year.

I was happy to be in the Midwest where close pastoral care was welcomed and appreciated. I visited those who were sick, in prisons, shut-ins, as well as contacting persons in homes to get to know them better. Administratively, I led leadership retreats

¹⁷ Ibid., 44.

every fall, which included vision casting, evaluation, and goal setting. Sermons have been focused on healing hurts, giving hope, and upholding our values, with a missional focus that is personal, local, and global. All of this has been within my own comfort zone for the past 19 years I have been at Northridge.

Our church has been able to accomplish much over the past 20 years, but we have come to a place in our journey when we have been halted by the sinking sands. These were the sinking sands of individualism instead of a collective faith journey, isolation instead of communal ministry, and weak attempts in our own strength to show compassion in our professions of love for one another rather than courage and authenticity. We failed to take seriously this warning from Larry Crabb: “We were designed to connect with others. Connecting is life. Loneliness is the ultimate horror. In connecting with others, we nourish and experience that life as we freely share it. Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe under water.”¹⁸ All of our achievements, the warmth of our fellowship, and significant gains in the work of the kingdom did beg the question, “What’s wrong?” Another question we all whispered to ourselves was this: Why are our leaders and the pastoral staff feeling the symptoms of burnout?

One factor among several was that we were suffering from the destructive effects of long-term equilibrium. Pascale states, “Prolonged equilibrium is a precursor of disaster” in the book *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*.¹⁹ He says, “Equilibrium occurs when an

¹⁸ Crabb, *Connecting*, 45.

¹⁹ Pascale, Millerman & Gioja. *Surfing the Edge Of Chaos*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 20.

organism matches the requirements of its environment while meeting its own needs with available resources.”²⁰ While allowing for some healthy differentiation, it has felt at times as though we are in a midlife crisis and, while not looking too bad to one another, we have simply disengaged, become somewhat bored, and want somebody or something else. Church members and leaders have settled into a danger zone of comfort, and “coping mechanisms that have atrophied during long periods of equilibrium prove inadequate for the new challenge.”²¹ We did not cope well with the discontent in the midst of anxiety caused by staff changes, a remodeling project, launching a new church plant, and a three-month sabbatical for me, their Senior Pastor, all within about an 18-month period of time. “Prolonged equilibrium dulls an organism’s senses and saps its ability to arouse itself appropriately in the face of danger.”²²

It seemed as if we all entered a spin cycle of tension, and we were not sure why. We were not well enough equipped as individuals nor as an institution to recognize the importance of making a distinction between personal issues of the pastor and members of the congregation and what were institutional concerns. Without being fully submitted to the Lord and His ways of engaging one another, in order to have strong relationships, we were unable to have the helpful conversations which could have given us more insights to

²⁰ Ibid., 21.

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Ibid., 21.

better understand reality. “Reality has an irritating habit of shifting, seriously complicating our favorite fantasies.”²³

Authentic Change Starts Here

My own reservations concerning risking the vulnerability of deeper relationships, which have become more obvious to me in the past two years, became clearer while on a three-month sabbatical. I realized that I have not been willing to fully embrace God’s call to go deeper spiritually in my relationship with Him, nor have I been willing to go deeper in building and nurturing relationships with an authentic heart for genuine community. I have tried to model going harder, faster, and longer to make things happen, and pushed our people to do the same, as if that was the way to defeat the enemy of our souls. I failed to follow the life-giving spiritual rhythms of Christ’s life (as mentioned in the former section; they will be considered further in the last section of this paper.) The result is an empty, sick way to live, for it is based on following the idols of our cultural values, achievement, and speed, rather than on the hope that is ours in the ways of Christ.

Since we live for Christ in enemy territory, we should be thankful for God’s grace, which allows us to live in community with Christian brethren. The church is the Body of Christ as we put our trust in Him together. By “the church,” I mean “the whole company” of believers in the present era, as well as a congregation or assembly of professing believers.²⁴ We are all members together²⁵ in a missional life. Whatever God

²³ Scott, Susan. *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and In Life One Conversation at a Time*. (New York: Berkley Books, 2004), 14.

²⁴ Vine, *An Expository Dictionary*, 84.

has done in our lives, we are called to do in the community of faith where we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

As Bonhoeffer says, “What God did to us, we then owed to others”.²⁶ This must become the basis of our faith community, not what Bonhoeffer calls a community which has “sprung from wish dream ... of what Christian life together should be.”²⁷ Such a community, according to Bonhoeffer, will sooner or later collapse if our focus does not turn to seeking what God wants us to be in Christ.²⁸ It is possible to see how the visionary leaders, who may be so attractive in our present culture, could actually be troubling to God’s own purposes for a faith community. Bonhoeffer makes this point. “God hates visionary dreaming, it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of a community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself.”²⁹ We set ourselves up for failure, disappointment, and disillusionment when we set out to build the church. Only Christ has taken this role for Himself, saying “I will build my church” in Matthew 16:18. “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” (NASB) “You” is a reference to the believers at Corinth. Paul wrote, “To the church of God which is at Corinth”. 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 (NASB).

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more surely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.”³⁰

Many have been quite faithful to follow my lead. In doing more I have had little time to even contemplate being more present with the Lord and His people. Being more present would require doing less and neither of those possibilities was a comfortable way for me to do ministry. Our people were also content to focus on going, doing, serving, even sacrificing in order to try to fulfill our mission. We were like spiritual workaholics who busied ourselves and buried ourselves with what was comfortable and easy for us, rather than to push through any fears on into deep relationships, which would require deep change. The staff and our people were locked into the stress of what Friedman describes as a triangle. This is the stress one experiences when a person becomes enmeshed in a relationship with someone else, and are both addicted or attached to the comfortable feeling of being too busy.³¹ Friedman explains that the only way out of this “is to make the two persons responsible for their own relationship, or the other person responsible for his or her problem, while all still remain connected.”³²

Our message has been to care for one another and those outside the church with the love of Christ, but in our superficiality we have failed to go deeper relationally with the Lord and have tended to avoid threatening experiences of getting too close to each other. There is, we tell ourselves, no time for deep care. We have a job to do. It is a

³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

³¹ Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2007), 220.

³² *Ibid.*

temptation, for ministers especially, to pursue what Henri Nouwen calls “individual heroism” within our competitive culture.³³ There is this idea that we really should be able to do it all, and burnout sets in when the reality of our own humanity knocks us off a pedestal of unrealistic expectations. Nouwen suggests a spiritual path to healing and renewal in the midst of such individualism. He says in his book *In the Name of Jesus* that leaders must be steeped in prayer and must also “be persons willing to confess their own brokenness and ask forgiveness from those to whom they minister.”³⁴

Bonhoeffer says that honest confession “in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride ... because this humiliation is so hard we continually scheme to evade confessing to a brother.”³⁵

On a Sunday morning I was led by the Lord to do this with my people. I apologized for the way I had led them at an insane pace, and asked their forgiveness for the harm my leadership style had brought to the congregation. We had become so distant that it was too difficult for people with concerns to even approach me, or one another. Burnout was the result of such relational dysfunction. Prayerful confession and forgiveness have been necessary as the path to healthier relationships and more strength to serve according to the Lord’s true calling and mission for our people. Bonhoeffer goes on to say, “it is nothing else but our fellowship with Jesus Christ that leads us to an

³³ Nouwen, Henri J.M. *In the Name of Jesus - Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing company, 1989), 57.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 111.

ignominious dying that comes in confession, in order that we may in truth share in his cross ... In confession we break through to the true fellowship of the cross of Jesus Christ.”³⁶ There may be more than this to escape this dangerous zone of comfortable individualism, but if I had not humbly taken these steps, I do not think it matters what else I might have tried to move forward together with our people, as followers of Christ who profess to know and proclaim His love.

Robert Quinn claims,

It is staying in the normal state that leads to a loss of energy and ultimately to slow death. This is the paradox of the normal state: in clinging to comfort and safety, we lose precisely what we seek to preserve. When we commit to leaving our zone of comfort and seeking deep change, we experience a renewal that is not limited to one segment of our lives.³⁷

Such transformation is necessary in order to break free and experience more of what we have been willing to ignore over the years, a commitment to authentic community flowing from a deeper love for God than ourselves.

The sinking sands at our church have called for deep change in the midst of deep disillusionment, deep isolation, deep confusion, deep loss, and deep regrets. In painful times of accepting responsibility and lovingly confronting one another, we are trying to be more honest about our fears. Quinn says that in pursuing such change “we experience dark nights of the soul. The key is how we respond to them-whether by retreating into our zone of comfort or continuing to be open and willing to continue building the bridge as we walk on it.”³⁸ Each of us is seeking God’s grace to set us free from the grip of our

³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 114.

³⁷ Quinn, *Building The Bridge*, 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

own weaknesses and self-deception, in order to be at our best for the Lord and one another.

I have discovered that it is impossible for me to change people, and yet by the way I live my own life and lead others, I am able to have a significant influence on others even in this matter of moving forward with a new plan, following new life-giving commands. It is necessary for me to lead the way to deep change, because I cannot lead others to any deep change if I have not experienced it in my own life. “The energy and moral power of people in the fundamental state of leadership tends to be contagious. In our self-transformation we become a living symbol of change.”³⁹ To be free of the soil of self-centeredness, as evidenced by doing ministry in ways that satisfied my own preferred hard-charging style, I must first model a willingness to give up treasured attachments to comfort, safety, and control. This needs to be done humbly, which for me is with the grace to accept my own humanity. It is the only way of life for living the dream of making a difference for Christ.

Coping In the Chaos

When I returned from a sabbatical, I wondered what had happened to the calm comfortable church I had been leading just a few months earlier. It seemed there was chaos no matter which way I turned. I soon realized that God had a new plan, which happened in the midst of chaos in order for us to move forward. Until then, I had never seen chaos as something positive, but I now have seen first-hand how God is able to

³⁹Quinn, Building The Bridge, 63.

accomplish His purposes when He first breaks up “the fallow ground”. “Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness, break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes to rain righteousness on you” (Hosea 10:12).

In his discussion of managing distress as part of a design for emergence, Pascale makes these observations, which became evident to us at our own church.

When stakeholder groups roll up their sleeves to discuss and confront the issues in the marketplace, unspoken grievances, suspicions, and contentions come to the surface. This hidden conflict is a priceless resource. Like nuclear energy, it is abundant and of great value to anyone prepared to harvest its potential. Gradually members learn to work together and respect opinions that do not conform to their own. What is taking place, of course, is a shift in the relationship among participants, an improvement in their overall emotional intelligence.⁴⁰

He goes on to say, “This can be characterized as a shift in being. When it has taken place, a new realm of possibility is available. Actions that could not have been taken previously happen quite naturally and yield surprising results. This is not easy, nor is it enough. But it is a beginning.”⁴¹

Discussions in a pivotal Congregational Business Meeting led to the establishment of a new group called the W3O Task Force [Who, What, When, W x 3 Organization] composed of four persons in our church with amazing business expertise and spiritual depth. Their spiritual maturity was based on the ways their lives reflected the ways of Christ in various contexts in and away from our church. They were appointed to guide us in an in-depth evaluation and then help then lead the church into and through a new organizational structure. Knowing that structure alone cannot enhance our fellowship or strengthen our relationships, this group was able to observe relational

⁴⁰Pascale, *Coping In The Chaos*, 206.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 207.

distance in the way we went about doing our ministry. They were asked to help strengthen our cohesiveness with new processes for working better together as a community in ministry and fulfilling our mission. This was really an incredible decision by the church members to be willing to give up control of cherished positions and power for the good of our fellowship and common commitment to be the community God wants us to be in Christ. We have discovered in this experience that “adults are much more likely to act their way into thinking, than to think their way into acting.”⁴² As we enact new ways of doing our ministry together with a new organizational approach, our people are coming to new ways of thinking.

When a couple of our leaders could not get a firm handle on a stabilizing course for the church, the W3O members and our congregation made a course-changing decision. Surowiecki seems to be justified in saying, “If you can assemble a diverse group of people who possess varying degrees of knowledge and insight, you’re better off entrusting it with major decisions rather than leaving them in the hands of one, or two people, no matter how smart those people are.”⁴³ We have found this group for re-organization around a new vision for community to be of great help to us as we look for new ways of doing life together and fulfilling our mission with the mind and heart of Christ. They created an atmosphere of what Pascale calls intellectual ‘swing,’ “making everyone work harder, think smarter, and reach better conclusions than they would have

⁴² Pascale, *Coping In The Chaos*, 14.

⁴³ Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of the Crowds*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 207.

on their own.”⁴⁴ This is not possible without relational transformation that is in keeping with our missional values.

True To Our Values

Identifying and accepting the chaos, as well as recognizing the need for change, should not be done in a way that sacrifices core values. A new plan with new commands must be in keeping with our commitment to being incarnational, relational, spiritual, and missional in order to fulfill the call of Christ as individuals and as a church. “A vision that truly enlists and inspires others wells up from their deep needs and aspirations. The vision moves others because it is deeply in touch with their reality and hopes. That is why they respond.”⁴⁵

Over years of corporately seeking God’s direction and call, we have come to a mutual acceptance of these statements of purpose, vision, and shared values.

The purpose is to lift up Jesus Christ that all people may be drawn into Him to the glory of God.

Our vision is to be growing as disciples, caring for others, and sharing Jesus as we strive to carry out God’s mission. We have laid the foundation and established ministry teams according to our expressed values that include the following areas of ministry.

Servant Leadership: following Christ’s example and recognizing the greatest in God’s kingdom is the servant of all.

⁴⁴Pascale, *Coping In The Chaos*, 177.

⁴⁵Quinn, *Building The Bridge*, 139.

Christ-honoring worship: celebrating who Christ is, and embracing Him in spirit and in truth individually and with other believers, being Christ-centered and Spirit-led in prayer, praise, and celebration.

Caring fellowship: sharing who we are and what we have with one another with the heart of Christ, encouraging one another through caring, sharing, and loving, to offer support and healing for individuals and families.

Generous Stewardship: giving the first part of what we have and more as God leads, with a cheerful heart in the way that Christ gave of Himself for us.

Intensive Discipleship: learning and growing together in order to conform to the image of Christ and help one another on our spiritual journey based on God's word.

Loving Friendship: loving God with all of our heart and our neighbors as ourselves, caring, and giving to anyone in need in the name and character of Christ, expressing active involvement in matters of social righteousness.

A Mission-Focused Lifestyle: following Christ's example and teaching to share His love as led by the Spirit to all within our influence in our own neighborhoods, our community and even to the remotest parts of the earth, to bring them to a personal experience of salvation through Jesus Christ.

All of this is to say that it is our intention to lift up, or honor, Christ in the following ways as we try to live out these values in our daily lives. There are specific steps and plans being written and formulated in an ongoing effort to put into action, what we say we value.

I. Caring for Others

“We live relationally in an awareness of others and respond with the love of Christ.”

II. Growing as Disciples

“We intentionally engage in life with others, following Christ as He transforms us into His image.”

III. Sharing Jesus

"We share our lives joyfully, in a way that naturally invites others to put their faith in Jesus."

Authenticity Required

Having values clearly defined is important, but they are of little use if our actions do not reflect that which we profess. Without integrity we will remain stuck in the grip of relational superficiality “Integrity requires alignment of our values – the core beliefs and behaviors that we have claimed as important to us—and our actions... If behaviors within an organization are not in alignment with the values described so prettily in the mission statement, the company’s immune system is weak, rendering it vulnerable when opportunities to get sick come along.”⁴⁶

Our W30 Task Force had the right mix of gifts and personality types to help us become honest about ourselves, “speaking the truth in love” and helping us come out from behind the things we have feared in order to be free from our stuck position. Through many hours of interviews and meetings with leaders, groups, staff members, our congregation, and each other, the task force members artfully used many of the principles listed by Susan Scott in *Fierce Conversations known as Mineral Rights*. These steps

⁴⁶Scott, *Fierce Conversations*, 54.

include: Identify your most pressing issue. Clarify the issue. Determine the current impact. Determine the future implications. Examine your personal contribution to this issue. Describe the ideal outcome. Commit to action.⁴⁷

Influencing Change

Throughout this experience, I have learned the value of reframing the story of my life and ministry as well as the story of our church. Instead of being overwhelmed by stress, fear of community, and attachments to my own comfort zones, I have made real progress in seeing that the only way to be the missional minister and church we hope to be is by being authentic and submissive to the Lord and to one another. When the apostle Paul was stuck in the grip of his own weakness, he sought the Lord. The Lord responded saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As Lead Pastor, I see the importance of helping our people see themselves in a new story. “If you want to change how they behave, you first change how they think.”⁴⁸ One of the most effective ways to influence the way people think is through the telling of stories according to Kerry Patterson in the book *Influencer – The Power to Change Anything*.

Told well, a detailed narration of an event helps listeners drop their doubts as to the credibility of the solution or the change being proposed. When they can picture the issue in a real-world scenario, it helps them see how

⁴⁷ Ibid., 249

⁴⁸ Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan, Al Switzier. *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008, 20.

the results make sense ... concrete and vivid stories exert extraordinary influence because they transport people out of the role of critic and into the role of participant.⁴⁹

We are able to relate to the Apostle Paul telling his story about dealing with a weakness in his life, and finding God's grace to be sufficient. I am telling stories about relational issues in my own life, doing ministry without enough concern for depth in my relationships with the Lord and others in community. I have told these stories in conversations, one-to-one, and with significant impact in messages. We discovered that the areas where we need deep change are in connection, communication, accountability, and direction. I have shared my own responsibility for what Pascale calls "adaptive leadership" in order to make something of the Lord happen which would not otherwise happen.⁵⁰

I will continue to watch for ways to change the way our people think and challenge them about motivation and their ability in areas that matter most. The new plan and new commands that can set us free are ultimately in Christ and in one another. I adapted an exercise we used in class about inviting Christ into our prayer room to help all of us with the challenge before us.⁵¹

I took time in a message to ask our people in meditation to create a room where we would invite Jesus to come in and be our guest. I then asked questions about how they might treat Him. We considered how we would give and be our best for Him. I then

⁴⁹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁵⁰ Pascale, *Coping In The Chaos*, 39.

⁵¹ Mary Kate Morse, class notes from DMin 532 "Developing a Healthy Church" (October 26, 2009).

asked them to now invite the persons who troubled them to come into that same room. They were challenged to consider how persons who were a threat would be treated. The way we respond to others is the way we truly respond to Christ. In this way, I challenged them to treat one another in the same way we treat Christ. Only with such a new way of going deeper with Christ and with one another will we be set free from the grip of superficiality and be able to fulfill our mission.

New Life in Ministry through Relational Transformation

What are the transformational keys for sustaining hope in relationships? What does it mean for ministers to follow the example of the Master, who washed the disciples' feet, within hours of being abandoned by them? Where shall we find hope and strength for moving deeper into relationships with our people just "as Christ loved the church?" We do need a new plan like that Mars rover stuck in sand, which will transform us and set us free. The new plan must originate in Christ himself. In Christ, alone we are set free from the sinking sands of individualism, isolation, and hypocrisy. He will give wisdom and courage to identify the relational disorder and danger zones, which lead to a breakdown in our faith community and of our effectiveness.

One important practical element for transforming our relationships is to more effectively manage conflict in our relationships. Frank Green has given great practical steps for dealing with conflict, found in Appendix B, *Conflict Resolution and Communication Guide lines* on page 192.

We failed to take seriously this warning from Larry Crabb: "We were designed to connect with others. Connecting is life. Loneliness is the ultimate horror. In connecting

with others, we nourish and experience that life as we freely share it. Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe under water.”⁵²

Quinn claims, “In our self-transformation we become a living symbol of change.”⁵³ To be free of the loose soil of self-centeredness, a minister must first model a humble willingness to give up treasured attachments to comfort, safety, and control. It is the only way of life for living the dream of making a difference for Christ.

Conclusion

It is not enough hear the Word; it is imperative to “be doers” of it, as well (James 1:22). Hope will be sustained only by engaging others relationally in personal ways, as well as blessing them according to God’s commands. God’s commands are clear. “Love one another” (Romans 13:8). “Be devoted to one another” (Romans 12:10). “Honor one another” (Romans 12:10). “Live in harmony with one another” (Romans 12:16). “Accept one another” (Romans 15:7). “Serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). “Submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:13). “Encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). “Show hospitality to one another” (1 Peter 4:9) and more.

Larry Crabb suggests a place to start. “Start with one or two people. It’s just like sharing the gospel. We can (and we should) pray for the world, but we must talk with our neighbors. Ask God to soften our heart with one person, maybe two, three at the most whose battle you will enter... Keep in mind that solving people’s problems is really a

⁵² Crabb, *Connecting*, 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63.

secondary battle where you may not be able to help. The primary battle is to know God well... Let people know that we're struggling for them, that we've entered the battle for their souls to more fully experience Christ."⁵⁴ We were created in God's image, the image of the Triune God. We were not created to be alone. Engage and bless others in order to sustain the hope that is yours in Christ.

Jesus has given this command. "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6:28) Again, it is easy to wonder where to begin. A great place to start to be more effective in blessing others is to follow the principles in "the blessing" as it was offered in the Old Testament. This way of blessing others is explained in a wonderful book by Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent. It is a way to offer unconditional love and approval, using the five elements of the blessing, including meaningful touch, a spoken message, attaching a high value, picturing a special future, and an active commitment.⁵⁵

Ministers often feel overwhelmed with the choice of taking the risk of being vulnerable and hurt deeply by people we want to trust and love, or going into deep isolation where there are no reasons to believe we will feel anything but empty. In weakness, confusion, and fear, there is still hope. The cost of caring is a heavy burden which can lead to despair, but not far from us is the Light, who is Christ. Let us keep moving toward the Light as Christian was instructed in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and there we will find hope and Life.

⁵⁴Crabb, *Connecting*, 152-153.

⁵⁵Trent, John and Smalley, Gary. *The Blessing*. (Nashville:Thomas Nelson, 1993), 29.

In the next section, we will consider important keys to emotional health in ministry. There are emotional keys to a new way of life in ministry that will help sustain hope in the midst of burnout.

CHAPTER 5

EMOTIONAL KEYS FOR SUSTAINING HOPE

Important keys for sustaining hope in ministry include an emotional ability to understand one's self and function within stress and chaos as a non-anxious presence. Friedman, in his book *Generation to Generation*, refers to a minister's role within the congregation as a family system when he makes this point. "What is vital for changing any kind of 'family' is not knowledge of technique or even of pathology, but rather the capacity of the family leader to define his or her own goals and values while trying to maintain a non-anxious presence within the system."¹ There are psychological factors which cannot be ignored in order for a minister to believe that he can be used of God as an agent of change and an effective ambassador for Christ. Sustained hope for the future is more than just a promise to those who keep their faith. It is also an essential element in a minister's ability to lead effectively. "Ultimately, healing and survival depend on existential categories: on vision, for example, on hope, on imaginative capacity, on the ability to transcend the anxiety of those about us, and on a response to challenge that treats crisis as opportunity for growth."²

In this section, I will present emotional keys for sustaining hope in the ministry. There will be consideration of what is needed for emotional strength and stability to transcend the anxiety all around us. We will focus on the need for self-differentiation, the dangers of emotionally drifting to the dark side, where we find hope in dealing with our

¹ Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation- Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

addictions and attachments, hope in the midst of loss, and what it will take to lead others into a new world of faith. There are transformational keys that can give us hope in any situation, especially in the midst of our own doubts and feelings of inadequacy.

A young evangelical missionary served for a few years in Mexico, where she was in charge of children's ministries. The ministry team was in Aguescalientes and attempted to reach people of all ages in a spiritually dark and desperately poor culture. The stress was terribly intense for Candi. At one point, she carried the weight of a VBS program that ministered to over 200 children. Under the physical and emotional strain, she developed chronic fatigue syndrome and was weakened to the point she had to come home to the States. Her nerves were so raw, and the emotional tension so deep, she could not go back to Mexico. She ultimately had to file a disability claim while she has carried on a long battle with chronic fatigue and depression. At one point Candi said, "I am afraid at times of losing my own identity. I forget who I really once was, and wonder who I am."

Candi expresses the feelings of many in need of psychological keys for sustaining hope in ministry:

You long for a way out, a solution and redemption to come, the pain to go away and "the good old days" to come back. You may feel like despairing, or maybe you're depressed and feel like you can't get out of the pit you suddenly find yourself in. Perhaps you can't hear God in the darkness, and wonder if He's still there, or if He's doing anything on your behalf. Yet it is when we are at the end of our "ropes" that God shines the brightest in our darkness. Maybe I should say that it's when we see Him shine the brightest, because we are desperately and actively searching for Him in our pit of darkness, and not so distracted by everything fleeting that the world offers.³

³ F., Candi, interview by Ben Staley. *Looking For the Way Out of Depression* (February 10, 2010).

In Candi's comments, you can hear the type of emotional problems ministers wrestle with on a regular basis. We experience feelings of being over-whelmed, stretched beyond our abilities. Depression and despair may weaken our ability to perform up to the expectation of others and diminish our self-esteem. We feel trapped by demands and circumstances. Ministers feel abandoned and alone, disappointed and deceived by false hopes, and in search of rest and comfort from the Savior.

Self-Differentiation While Staying Connected

Henry Nouwen, in his book *The Wounded Healer*, asks this question regarding the struggles we face in ministry:

But what are our wounds? They have been spoken about in many ways by many voices. Words such as "alienation," "separation," "isolation," and "loneliness" have been used as the names of our wounded condition. Maybe the word "loneliness" best expresses our immediate experience and therefore most fittingly enables us to understand our brokenness. The loneliness of the minister is especially painful; for over and above his experience as a man in modern society, he feels an added loneliness resulting from the changing meaning of the ministerial profession itself.⁴

Such loneliness and alienation complicates our ability to lead at such a distance from others and may cause us to overcompensate and lose our own identity out of our need of others.

I have always felt like an outsider, even as a boy who made hard choices regarding friends who had different values. Out of my understanding of God's expectations I chose to distance myself from influences that could easily lead me away from an intimate relationship with the Lord, which always requires deep love and loyalty

⁴ Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 84.

to God first. The feelings of loss with such choices have caused me to seek greater self-worth in what I could do for the Lord and others, rather than to be able to relax in the comfort and peace of self-acceptance. Busy doing all that I could to satisfy my own standards of achievement and service, I have had little time over the years I have been in ministry to slow down long enough for intimacy in relationships with others and the Lord Himself. I have, at times, paid the price for such distance in periods of conflict within a congregation. Without merging well personally with some factions in the body of believers beyond performance expectations, I have had difficult times in conflict management when there were not established lines of communication. My choices to be alone and distant may have served a noble purpose at times as a boy, when it seemed to be the Lord's leading toward more holy living, but it has failed to give me the foundation needed for more effective ministry. Such a foundation seems to be established through self-differentiation, rather than relational distance.

“It is far easier for a head to remain attached if it is content to merge its ‘self’ with the body. Any leader can stay in touch if he or she does not try to stand out. The trick ... is to be able to differentiate self and still remain in touch despite the body's efforts to counter such differentiation.”⁵ It is the ability to define and uphold one's goals and values in the midst of the great pressures put on by members of a congregation, which will allow a minister to lead his people effectively. With calm strength, and determination to take full responsibility for his own thoughts and behavior, a minister is able to offer sound, spirit-filled leadership to people who long for any sign of stability in an ever-changing atmosphere. This strong, peaceful presence is the essence of differentiated leadership and

⁵ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 229.

is a path that leads one away from stress-filled labor and burnout in ministry. (See Appendix C *Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Truisms in Constructive Relationships* by Frank Green, page 195.)

Edmund Friedman helps us understand how to keep calm and connected, while having differing ideas and opinions.

Differentiation means the capacity of a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values apart from the surrounding togetherness pressures to say "I" when others are demanding "you" and "we." It includes the capacity to maintain a relatively non-anxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being. . . . Differentiation means the capacity to be an "I" while remaining connected.⁶

It is a dangerous temptation we face when, for a little peace and quiet, we give in to pressure or resistance, which Friedman calls "sabotage." "Sabotage is not merely something to be avoided or wished away; instead, it comes with the territory of leading, whether the territory is a family or an organization. And a leader's capacity to recognize sabotage for what it is—that is, a systemic phenomenon connected to the shifting balances in the emotional processes of a relationship system and not to the institution's specific issues, makeup, or goals—is the key to the kingdom."⁷ In other words, when a minister is leading with impact, there should be some resistance, some emotion-based efforts to push back against any threatening change.

In a doctoral class, one of my professors and a therapist, Dr. Frank Green, told us that he shared this "encouragement" with his pastor. "If you are getting resistance or

⁶ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

⁷ Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing), 2007, 11.

criticism about once a day, then that's about right for good leadership."⁸ Dr. Green also said that ministers should be in a regular routine of talking with a counselor to keep their sanity. In a similar situation, Friedman gave women who were trying to maintain their differentiated position in marriage this advice. "Whenever your husband calls you a bitch you are probably going in the right direction. See if you can get him to say that more often. For when one individual in a marriage stands up to another, while the other will not take it at first, he or she generally begins to find the person more attractive."⁹ Simply stated in terms of our ministry, "There may be initial resistance, but if the leader can stay in touch with the resisters, the body will usually go along."¹⁰

However, all those in leadership know that there are no guarantees of eventual support from those who may wish to see you leave instead of lead. In relational conflict, there is an ongoing battle in the preservation of self. "The problem is preserving self in a close relationship. No human on planet earth does that well."¹¹ The challenge is an ongoing, lifelong process that is more of a direction in life than a simple goal to be reached. "Differentiation is charting one's own way by means of one's own internal guidance system rather than perpetually eyeing the 'scope' to see where others are at. Differentiation refers more to a process than a goal that can ever be achieved... Differentiation refers to a direction in life rather than a state of being:

⁸ Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008. Dr. Green gives practical help to pastors dealing with burnout through his ministry on an excellent website. I discovered this material at the following site. Green, Frank. *Charis*. January 1, 2008. <http://www.charisfoundation.com/index.html> (accessed January 1, 2008).

⁹ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 185.

¹⁰ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 229.

¹¹ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 181.

- Differentiation is the capacity to take a stand in an intense emotional system.
- Differentiation is saying “I” when others are demanding “we.”
- Differentiation is containing one’s reactivity to the reactivity of others, which includes the ability to avoid being polarized.
- Differentiation is maintaining a non-anxious presence in the face of anxious others.
- Differentiation is knowing where one ends and another begins.
- Differentiation is being clear about one’s own personal values and goals.
- Differentiation is taking maximum responsibility for one’s own emotional being and destiny rather than blaming others or the context.¹²

What is needed in the ministry is a type of Old World courage that the explorers like Columbus possessed when they sailed into the New World with none of the sophisticated navigation equipment we have in our day. “In the final analysis the relationship between risk and reality is about leadership. The Old World’s process of reorientation could never have come about if that civilization had not produced individuals who were willing to go first.”¹³ They possessed a passion for discovering a new way of life in a new world, which so consumed them that they were not overcome by any fears of the unknown. It is almost as though they had a greater fear of not experiencing something more than average, more than mediocre, more than the routine boundaries of the status quo in their time.

Sustaining hope in ministry depends on an inner passion for a “new world” of ministry in the power and grace of God that lies beyond our excuses and our fears. “For the most part what united those who went first was desire, the capacity to be decisive, and just plain ‘nerve’ rather than knowledge of data or technique.”¹⁴ Only a differentiated

¹² Ibid., 183.

¹³ Ibid., 187.

¹⁴ Ibid.

person has “the capacity of maintaining a “non-anxious” presence in the midst of a stressed system, and to take responsibility for one’s own behavior, choices and emotional well-being. Therefore the differentiated person can take strategic independent action and bring change within a stressed system.”¹⁵

Friedman says a non-anxious presence has the capacity to enable religious leaders “to be more clear headed about solutions and more adroit ... but because of the systemic effect that a leader’s functioning always has on an entire organism, a non-anxious presence will modify anxiety throughout the entire congregation.”¹⁶ This type of strength in leadership “can sometimes do more to resolve issues than the ability to come up with good (content) solutions.”¹⁷

I have been in a position of leadership among Christian leaders here in Wichita, where I have seen the impact of a non-anxious presence be a more powerful influence than anything I might have said in a very tense situation. When an abortion provider, Dr. George Tiller, was killed in his own church by a pro-life activist in our community, there were persons on both sides of the issue calling for careful, strategic actions and public statements that would seize the moment to guard or enhance their own best interests and positions. I was President of the largest evangelical ministers group in Kansas at the time. I received calls from various pro-life leaders telling me to say and do nothing, since it would only be criticized under the circumstances. Pro-choice groups were telling their leadership to go after the pro-life people with a public outcry against those they

¹⁵Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

considered the “radical right” fringe, who should be stopped. Now was their opportunity to discredit any who were against abortion on demand.

With the Lord’s help and grace I prayerfully contacted religious leaders from both camps and said that this could divide our city and lead to more violence in our community. I suggested that this would be a great time to call all of our people together for a city-wide prayer gathering. This was so well received on both sides of the issue that not only did we have local unity and support, national leadership from religious groups on both sides of this issue sent in official commendation and support for the prayer gathering. A calm call to prayer without judgment or blame was more powerful than anything else I could have said or done in those circumstances.

On our best days we may, like Peter, recognize the Lord off in the distance in the storm and ask Him to draw us unto Himself, even if it involves crossing a threatening sea. In His power and at His calling we begin our quest for a thrilling adventure. However, too often I am caught looking at the waves of trouble instead of the Lord’s outstretched hands. Waves of stress create waves of doubt that become more debilitating than the sea, and I begin to sink in the depths of insecurity. Then the same question that the Lord asked Peter has a way of keeping us awake in the night of despair, “Why did you doubt?”¹⁸

Drifting Into the Dark Side

Why, indeed, is it difficult to believe that it is possible to be self-differentiated in spite of the reactivity of others, while staying relationally connected? It is possible that we lack the passion for something more in keeping with God’s best for ourselves and

¹⁸ Matthew 14:22-31.

others, which includes deep joy along with the deep pain found in intimate relationships. It is a temptation to settle for the feeling of being safe, which is only an illusion. We doubt our own abilities, as well as the Lord's faithfulness. Paralyzed by our own uncertainty, we long for validity and self-worth. It becomes easy to drift into what McIntosh and Rima call "manic activity" in order to have success.¹⁹ They speak about some of our most serious struggles in their book *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*.

At the core of the problem is personal ambition and the insidious desire to have or possess something that is not able to be possessed—namely, success. We live in a culture obsessed with both *having* and *success*... The problem arises from the fact that success is not something one can *have* or *possess*. True success is a state of *being* not *having*.

Unfortunately, many Christian leaders are driven manically to have success. In the church, having success is measured by how many people you have attending your service, the size of the facility you have, the number of staff members you have, how many user-friendly programs you have, and the size of the budget you have. As a result, leaders who need to *have* success to validate themselves are driven to acquire these things and are willing to pay virtually any price to do so... As a result, even when these leaders succeed in creating a large congregation, a large facility and all the other markers...they are no closer to actually having success or possessing the inner feelings of success that they have been seeking through their manic activity. It is at this point that leaders often begin looking elsewhere in an effort to assuage their needs for personal validation and worth—needs they thought would be met by *having* a measure of success.²⁰

The Apostle Paul seems to demonstrate a re-calculation of what was of greater worth than all he possessed in Philippians 3:7-9. His identity of *being* in Christ was worth every sacrifice.

¹⁹ McIntosh Gary L., Rima Samuel D. *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership - How to Become an Effective Leaders by Confronting Potential Faiures*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 19-20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.²¹

“All those ‘good things’ Paul enjoyed, all those advantages he possessed from his parents and from his own efforts that made him proud and self-reliant are considered now not as assets but as liabilities.”²² Paul is here presenting to the Philippians “a re-evaluation of values.”²³ The very things that he once thought to be so worthwhile were actually “working to destroy him because they were blinding him to his need for the real righteousness which God required that he himself could in no way achieve by his own efforts however earnest they may be.”²⁴ Paul gladly yielded all that he counted up, as on a scorecard for righteousness, to gain the Messiah he had longed for, to gain Christ, “this one person of supreme worth.”²⁵

The “dark side” is here used as defined by McIntosh and Rima. “It is the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion ... or some other significant problem that causes us to search for a reason why.”²⁶ According to the authors, such a condition may be reached by ambition, a need for approval, or a fear of

²¹ Philippians 3:7-9 (English Standard Version).

²² Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43, 135.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ McIntosh and Rima, *Dark Side of Leadership*, 28.

losing absolute control.²⁷ How we emotionally handle issues related to our dark side is mostly determined in our formative years within our families. “Our families—and our developmental years in that family—most certainly provide the catalyst for this mixture that determines the final shape our dark side will take. With rare exception the experiences of our childhood determine the degree to which we are controlled by the dark side of our personality and how it manifests itself when it comes to the exercise of leadership.”²⁸ As Frank Green states in his notes on *Systems Reality*, “Gaining a better understanding of the emotional processes still at work with regards to our family of origin and modifying responses that we learned in that context can aid significantly in the resolution of emotional and relational problems in the present.”²⁹

There is a pattern that emerges, which involves four stages in the development of the dark side. The first stage is involves one’s basic needs. The second stage involves a traumatic experience that threatens the satisfaction of certain needs. The third stage includes a feeling that our unmet need is the result of a personal failure, which creates an emotional debt that we feel we owe and have to pay. The fourth stage combines the effects of the needs, traumatic experiences, and emotional debts in an ongoing development of our dark side.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 70.

²⁸ Ibid., 72.

²⁹ Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008.

³⁰ McIntosh and Rema, *Dark Side of Leadership*, 79.

Ministers may be compulsive, narcissistic, paranoid, codependent, or passive-aggressive.³¹ At times when I have sensed that I could be motivated by my own unmet needs, instead of love for God and others, I have found myself praying that the Lord would please heal any and all pathology in my own soul, in order that my heart and my motives would be pleasing to Him. I have asked the Lord to heal anything in me which could lead me into the dark side of leadership. I am reminded of Paul who sought the Lord's help as he recognized his own weakness. The Lord's response to Paul should give us all hope.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.³²

"Divine power finds its full scope and strength only in human weakness, the greater the Christian's acknowledged weakness, the more evident Christ's enabling strength."³³ In the life of a believer there is the hope of both weakness and power. In our weakness, God is able to accomplish his will in powerful, redemptive ways. "Indeed, the cross of Christ forms the supreme example of power-in-weakness."³⁴ It is not that we take great delight in our weaknesses, but sufferings endured "for Christ's sake" afford opportunities for His power to reside in us and be effective in our lives.³⁵

³¹Ibid.

³² 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (English Standard Version).

³³ Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 397.

³⁴ Harris and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 397.

³⁵ Ibid.

The great danger all ministers face is the temptation to keep up a false front to protect a “cherished image.”³⁶ McIntosh and Rima say there is an incredible danger when we allow ourselves and others to be victimized by the dark side, because of our failure or refusal to take that inward journey and “‘ride the monster all the way down,’ regardless of the pain it may cause us. ... The pain required to confront our dark side and begin the process of overcoming it, will be directly proportionate to the danger, destruction, humiliation, and shame we will avoid.”³⁷

“Leadership through self-differentiation is not easy; learning techniques and imbibing data are far easier. Nor is striving or achieving success as a leader without pain: there is the pain of isolation, the pain of loneliness, the pain of personal attacks, the pain of losing friends. That is what leadership is all about.”³⁸ Ministers must be willing to embrace the pain, as a way of taking up the cross of Christ in order to sustain our hope and fulfill our calling. It will be necessary for us to accept the reactions and the anxiety of the people we serve, as leaders who are also Christ’s followers. He has given us an example that we should follow. “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.”³⁹ Just as Christ in love created a stir among the people He was with, we will also stir up emotional responses in our positions of leadership, especially if we follow Christ’s lead. “The very presence of differentiation in a leader will stir up anxious response. Yet staying in touch with the

³⁶ Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008.

³⁷ McIntosh and Rima, *Dark Side of Leadership*, 47.

³⁸ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 233.

³⁹ 1 Peter 1:21 (English Standard Version).

capacity to understand and deal effectively with the system is—beyond vision, beyond perspicacity, beyond stamina—the key to the kingdom.”⁴⁰

Hope In the Midst of Our Addictions and Attachments

A passage of scripture which I almost never hear quoted, but which has a depth of meaning for me, is 1 Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything." At times when I am longing for things which are not very good for me, I often am reminded in my spirit of this word from the Lord. At one time in my life, it became the only way I was able to convince myself to eat less.

It is also a reminder that causes me to evaluate whether or not I have the best motives for compassionate care and service for the Lord and others. I ask myself if there is “any wicked way in me” that leads me to go out of my way for one person and not another. Is there any reason, which may not be pleasing to the Lord that motivates me push for excellence and achievements in my life, my behavior, my education, or any personal gain? Am I truly living for the Lord and others out of genuine love, or am I too attached to anything harmful in any relationships? I have at times prayed, “Lord, heal me of anything in my life or my spirit that creates an unhealthy longing for a return of some kind in my service for you.”

In his comments on 1 Corinthians 6:12, Harold Mare suggests that there are four questions a Christian should ask as one evaluates what he has a right to do:

⁴⁰ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 186.

1. Is the thing being contemplated beneficial?
2. Will the practice in question overpower and dominate him and will the result affect others?
3. Will the practice support the truth that the body is “for the Lord” who created it and intended to be used for his glory?
4. Will it support the truth that “the Lord is for the body,” that is that the Lord has redeemed the body?⁴¹

In Gerald May’s book *Addiction and Grace*, I discovered what I have always believed but rarely ever discussed with anyone. We all suffer and struggle with addictions, or attachments. As May says, “Addiction is a state of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a person’s will and desire... We succumb because the energy of our desire becomes attached, nailed, to specific behaviors, objects, or people. Attachment, then, is the process that enslaves desire and creates the state of addiction.”⁴²

Addictions, or attachments, are capable of enslaving us to the point when it may be almost impossible to be free enough to be detached from a particular longing in order to be self-differentiated in ministry. By considering the symptoms of addiction it is possible to discern areas in our lives where we are able to “distinguish the slavery to an addiction from the freedom of true caring.”⁴³ I have been struck by the thought that it is possible to get so caught up in the daily challenges and details of ministry that we can become addicted to it all and miss what God may want me to experience as a gift of His love and leading in my life.

Margaret Feinberg notes that ministry can change every five minutes. “The problem is that too often we sacrifice our calling for the sake of ministry. The ministry

⁴¹ Mare and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 224.

⁴² May, Gerald G. *Addiction and Grace*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1991), 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

becomes so important, so central, that we lose the most important thing.”⁴⁴ For me, the most important thing, especially when I do not know what more or what else to do, is to simply follow Him.

One of the symptoms of an addiction is tolerance. It is “the phenomenon of always wanting or needing more of the addictive behavior or the object of attachment in order to be satisfied.”⁴⁵ An example of tolerance is to be so addicted to approval and adoration of others that the satisfaction of that need is able to modify our message or behavior in order to get the approval we long for. It may be that someone needs more and more attention or control, which causes aggressive behavior in the midst of ministry. “The essential dynamic of tolerance then, is that one becomes used to a certain amount of something, and this accustomedness removes the desired effect and leads to the need for more.”⁴⁶

An example of this in my life is found often in ministries outside of the immediate church family. I have had much joy in the moments of seeing lives touched and changed by the Lord in local and global ministry. It has been a source of pleasure to me to give worth to children in after-school programs, and criminals in prison, as well as support and encouragement to some of the poorest people in the world in Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, Africa. In addition, I have met and prayed with authorities in very dangerous situations and have been energized by such life-giving experiences.

⁴⁴ Feinberg, Margaret. *The Sacred Echo - Hearing God's Voice In Every Area of Your Life*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 95.

⁴⁵ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

I have to resist the temptation to have more and more of these experiences to kill the pain of doing work in my own local church with people who can make me want to run as far and as fast as I can by their rejection and their petty criticism. With God's grace, I must have the will to stay engaged in my own faith community, when it is easier to simply follow paths that lead to greater joy and feelings of greater self-worth.

Another symptom of addiction is the loss of will power. "One part of the will sincerely wants to be free. Another part wants to continue the addictive behavior."⁴⁷ It is a great temptation to give in to the longing for freedom to spend time any way you wish, rather than to engage in visitation ministry or counseling a troubled soul, which for many are both very draining forms of ministry. There is no spotlight, no life-giving return, only moments of un-noticed sacrificial care. It is possible to be so controlled by the enjoyment of a favorite hobby or restful place that it is difficult to resist the strong pull in that direction. May gives a way to test whether you are experiencing a loss of willpower over an addiction. "Do without it. If you are successful, there is no addiction. If you cannot stop, no amount of rationalization will change the fact that addiction exists."⁴⁸

I am a very affectionate person in the way I relate to others. I believe that this is, in part, an answer to a prayer in my teens, that I might love others in the way that Christ loved others and loves us still. I look forward to the physical touch of both men and women, as well as youth and children. I have to be honest, and ask if I could be satisfied to minister from a physical distance. Do I look forward too much to the next hug or

⁴⁷ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

embrace? How I answer such questions gives me a warning to be careful and controlled in such expressions of compassionate care.

Another characteristic of an addiction is the distortion of attention. “Addiction and its associated mind tricks inevitably kidnap and distort our attention, profoundly hindering our capacity for love, Attention and love are intimate partners; for love to be actualized, attention must be free.”⁴⁹ My wife would support this completely, and so would the people who long for my focused care. The Lord Himself has asked this of me. May says, “This distortion of attention...could be called ‘the distortion of ultimate concern.’ Another word for it is idolatry.”⁵⁰ This is idolatry in that it violates the command of the Lord to have “no other gods” before Him.⁵¹ Attention to anything in greater measure than is pleasing to the Lord is to put that object or that need as a higher priority than my loyalty to Christ.

It can be concluded that these forms of addictions or attachments, which can make me their slave, have the potential to keep me from the ability to be differentiated, either because of a loss of focus under pressure or by their sheer psychological influence. It is possible to fall into a rut of frustration and despair. Friedman says, “America is stuck in a rut of trying harder and harder without obtaining significantly any new results. The rut runs deep, affecting all institutions of our society irrespective of size or purpose... These institutions are stuck, and there exists a connection between the paralysis that leaders

⁴⁹ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Exodus 20:3.

experience and the paralysis in the thinking processes of those who would get them unstuck.”⁵²

If trying harder is not the answer, then what is to keep me from simply giving up? Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “The sin of respectable people reveals itself in flight from responsibility.”⁵³ This belief led Bonhoeffer to engage in a plot against Hitler. It is a worthwhile philosophy in our efforts to defeat our spiritual adversary as described in Ephesians 6 as “the devil” or “the evil one.”⁵⁴

Each of us has a responsibility to take steps which will lead us into a place where we can appropriate God’s love and grace in order to overcome any and all addictions or attachments that can lead us into ruin. A pastor and friend of mine has had an addiction to pornography in his past. With true humility, he confessed this problem to me rather than to keep silent. He took the risk to believe that I would respond to him in love rather than judgment. He also asked me to meet with him and hold him accountable over a period of about two years. In addition to these steps, he asked me and others to pray for him, that he might be set free with the support of friends, as well as God’s mercy and grace.

Addiction cannot be defeated by the human will acting on its own, nor by the human will opting out and turning everything over to divine will. Instead, the power of grace flows most fully when human will chooses to act in harmony with divine will. In practical terms, this means staying in a situation, being willing to confront it as it is, remaining responsible for the choices one makes in response to it, but at the same time turning to God’s grace, protection, and guidance as the ground for one’s choices and behavior.⁵⁵

⁵² Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 3.

⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 11.

⁵⁴ Ephesians 6:11,16.

⁵⁵ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 139.

The only hope of not being enslaved to anything is not by my own might, nor by my own power, but by God's Spirit, who sets me free. In addition, freedom from the things which may enslave us is not accomplished by an irresponsible flight from a context or source of trouble. My friend stayed in his marriage, which was difficult for both his wife and himself. He stayed in ministry when he had doubts about his own worthiness, as well as effectiveness. He stayed in relationships which would feel like taking a real risk. He stayed as close as he knew how to the Lord through prayer, submission to Him and other spiritual leaders, in order to appropriate his grace.

We will discuss further in the final section of this paper what other spiritual steps and exercises may help in appropriating God's grace.

Hope in the Midst of Loss

By definition, the sanctified life is one that is "set apart" for the Lord and His purposes.⁵⁶ There is no other way to live for Christ in a fallen world, than to be continually making choices to come away from the things of the flesh (those attachments) in order to "walk in the Spirit," as the scripture suggests in Galatians 5. The Apostle Paul exhorts, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do"⁵⁷

⁵⁶Grenz, Stanley J, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 105.

⁵⁷ Galatians 5:16-17.

When Paul speaks of “the flesh” in this context of comparing it with “the spirit,” he is referring to not merely physical existence, but also living according to the fallen nature of a person whose is living “apart from the intervention of God’s grace” by his own choosing.⁵⁸ In this context, “the spirit” is a reference to living your life with the Spirit of God within you. As we live in the spirit, He enables us to understand spiritual things (1Corinthians 2:14), receive Christ as Savior and Lord, call God “Father: “Father” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 2:14), and develop a Christian personality.⁵⁹ The way Paul has written this speaks to a continuing condition and an ongoing need to keep choosing to live in the spirit.

The practical implications of this have meant significant losses in my life, as for anyone who is truly committed to following Christ and keeping a strong relationship with Him their first priority. As a boy, when I could see how my friends at that time were having a bad influence on my life, I needed to put some relational distance between us. I spoke to them of how much they meant to me, but I was not living as close to what God wanted me to be when I was with them. I felt deep loss, within a deep level of peace. While I grieved the loss of close friends, I knew that it was the right thing for me to do. Since that time, I have had many similar experiences, as does any devoted follower of Christ, when I have had to give up relationships and preferred future plans, which were not in keeping with God’s plan. I grieve every time I leave a church or a place of ministry when I have deeply loved the people there. By “grieving,” I am referring to what Hart

⁵⁸Boice, James Montgomery *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10. ed. Frank E Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 495.

⁵⁹Ibid.

calls “reactive depression,” whether over bereavement or other forms of loss.⁶⁰ It is a way, according to God’s infinite wisdom, “of coping with the many losses that life deals us.”⁶¹ I have grieved over what might have been, when I put my immediate family first and released an adopted child to the care of Social Services for, in her rebellion, she became a serious danger to our entire family.

I have given up the approval of others when I have taken unpopular positions in various leadership roles. I have walked away from great opportunities to serve in organizations which would carry significant prestige and influence, in order to remain focused and loyal to more important priorities (such as following the greater human need instead of following the money I could earn). Like anyone in ministry, at times I have walked away from comfort and ease to be in hard places with the poor, those in prison, the sick and dying, as well as in repulsive situations with people living in the dark sins of this age.

True incarnational ministry will always begin with leaving “glory,” whatever that may mean, as did our Lord Jesus Christ. His first steps to redeem us were away from heaven. He was not attached to the glory of heaven. He has suffered unimaginable loss in order to fulfill His redemptive purposes. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Hart, Archibald D. *Coping with Depression in the Ministry and Other Helping Professions* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 41.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Philippians 2:5-7 (English Standard Version).

Here Paul presents Christ as the moral model or illustration of what he is asking of the believers at Philippi, and what the Lord is asking of us as ministers.⁶³ In Christ's choice of giving up glory for each of us we have the "supreme example of the humble, self-sacrificing, self-giving, service that Paul has been urging the Philippians to practice in their relations one toward another."⁶⁴ A minister follows this example of Christ when he or she gives up glory, or status, or self-gratification for the good of others. Our sacrifice can be used by our Heavenly Father in redemptive ways, and our ministry can be of great impact on the lives of others, when we follow the Lord and are willing to have His mind, that is a mind that will give up glory for the good of others.

The losses being discussed here are those referred to by the apostle Paul in Philippians 3. They are the necessary losses of identifying with Christ in a fallen world. "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."⁶⁵

Oneness with Christ, an intimate and authentic relationship with Christ, surpasses any loss in this world. At the same time, we still experience psychological reactions to such losses, which lead to grief and depression. We may lose loved ones and experience grief and depression in its most intense form, but reactive depression is the same process, even if it involves the loss of a prized possession or simply something you care for.

⁶³ Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 43, 79-80.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Philippians 3:7-9 (English Standard Version).

Losing your keys, losing your friend, or losing the respect and approval of others may not lead to clinical depression. “It is still fundamentally a reactive depression. The grieving process is what depression is all about. In fact, it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of depression by viewing all reactive depression as a grieving process.”⁶⁶

It is imperative to be realistic about the losses we feel in order to be able to deal with them effectively and move on from our grief and depression to function at our best for the Lord. To pretend we are above such feelings of reactive depression only prolongs the process of recovery. “The reality of the loss must be confronted and accepted. No reactive depression can be completed until the reality of the loss is fully realized and accepted... denial, self-pity, and wasted thought only serve to keep us from completing the grieving process and recovering from the depression.”⁶⁷

At times, I have found it difficult to admit or accept my own humanity. I grew up in a setting where it was unacceptable to contemplate the notion that I might not be able to perform up to the family standards of excellence. It felt as if approval was based on performance. This led to a level of perfectionism that has caused me to be defensive and not very good at living with any form of failure. I have at times been deeply affected by the loss of someone’s approval or love when my performance did not meet their expectations.

In his section on *Healing for Perfectionism*, Seamands suggests that our feelings “are often the result of the kind of god, the kind of people, the kind of life we saw, as we

⁶⁶ Hart, *Coping with Depression*, 41.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

looked through the relational windows of our childhood.” I always knew that I was loved, but I felt a need to be perfect, for whatever reason. When I have not been all that I feel I need to be for others, I can feel the loss of self-esteem and hope.

It has become necessary for me to recognize both my emotional tendencies and perceptions and the priorities of following Christ regardless of the cost.

In the case of a reactive depression (the most common kind), identifying the trigger event is a matter of recognizing the loss that has been felt—whether that loss is concrete or abstract, real, imagined, or threatened. It is important to remember, however, that what causes depression is not the loss in itself, but our perception of the loss. It is what the loss means to us in terms of our values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that determines how we will react to it and how deep the depression which follows will be.⁶⁸

Seamands gives us a helpful reminder about how the love of God in Christ allows us to have hope, whenever we may feel like a failure. “On the cross, God in Christ has absorbed all these kinds of painful feelings into His love. They have entered into His heart, pierced His soul, and been dissolved in the ocean of His forgiveness and the sea of His forgetfulness ... ‘God was in Christ reconciling (let’s make it personal), reconciling me to Himself, not counting my trespasses against me’ (see 2 Cor-[inthians](#) 5:19).”⁶⁹

At a time when another family left a new church plant we had started in Southern California, I was grieving over the loss to a congregation which needed everyone’s full commitment and involvement. I wondered how the Lord could simply allow people to leave when the church was barely surviving from one week to the next. We had seen wonderful miracles of changed lives and hundreds of decisions made over several months

⁶⁸ Hart, *Coping With Depression*, 67.

⁶⁹ Seamands, *Healing of Our Emotions*, 98-99.

of ministry, but there seemed to be no loyalty to the church, nor to any of us in leadership who were making great sacrifices to minister to their needs.

In my grief, I met with other leaders I could trust for strength and spiritual maturity, and sought the Lord in a time of silence and prayer. There I was impressed in my spirit to remember how everyone left the Lord. At one point He said to His disciples, “Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”⁷⁰ The Lord assured me that I can be doing exactly what He is asking of me and still be left alone. It was true in His own ministry. It also gave me confidence that He understood the loss I was feeling. I remembered how He asked His disciples “Will you also leave me?” when the masses turned on Him.⁷¹ If the Lord experienced such rejection of His perfect life and love, then how could I expect to be exempt from such loss as I followed Him?

Hart says, “A new perspective on the loss must emerge before depression can abate. As a depressed person is forced to accept the reality of a loss and to say in effect, ‘It’s gone! It’s never coming back. That is the end’ ... he must eventually go on to say, ‘But this is not the end of everything. There will be other objects and persons to prize.’” Again, it is important to keep Christ at the center of every situation, especially in our times of grief, as did the Apostle Paul. He counted all his cherished prizes as “loss”, not worth anything more than a pile of manure, compared to an intimate relationship with Christ (Philippians 3:8). “The perspective of life that God gives through faith in Christ

⁷⁰ John 16:31-33.

⁷¹ John 6:67.

can make the difference between whether we see loss as catastrophic or not. Our attitudes toward money, possessions, accomplishments, and ambitions are influenced by our faith—or at least they should be! God’s values become our values if we stay close to him.”⁷² In the midst of our losses, we are thrust into opportunities to evaluate our situation and determine what seems wise to cling to and to flee from. (See Appendix D *Can Attitudes and Behavior Cause Depression* by A. Hart on page 196.)

We can still be living a new way of life in ministry, the “not I, but Christ” life, even when we are grieving for what might have been. We can see this depth of loss when Jesus wept over the city. “When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.”⁷³ The challenge for me, and others in ministry, is to not be so devastated by the inevitable feelings of loss that I stumble and fail emotionally to carry out the mission I have in Christ.

Leading Others Into a New World

Friedman looks to the great explorers for keys to be able to lead the people within our calling to ministry into new worlds of faith and hope. He lists five factors that must be present in order to be able to effectively lead people to new horizons in any social system.

- Capacity to get outside of the emotional climate of the day.
- Willingness to be exposed and vulnerable.

⁷² Hart, *Coping with Depression*, 85.

⁷³ Luke 19:41-42 (English Standard Version).

- Persistence in the face of resistance and downright rejection.
- Stamina in the face of sabotage along the way.
- Ability to be headstrong and ruthless—at least in the eyes of others.⁷⁴

To believe that such ministry is possible in our own strength and ability is to engage in what could be considered the role of a hero, culminating in what has been called a “Messiah complex.” This is “the hero’s delusion that his or her efforts are both supremely ordained and indispensable for others’ health and salvation. Clerical heroes are ambitious, not necessarily in the materialistic or power sense, but in their belief that they can manage and handle a dozen or more projects or committees at once.”⁷⁵

To lead others into a new world, a world of faith and hope in Jesus Christ, will take a new intimacy with God, a relationship that is open, honest, authentic, and personally courageous and disciplined, not simply a better understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others. “There is need to develop and cultivate a personal spirituality. There is a need for a heartfelt personal relationship with God into which one enters ever more deeply each day.”⁷⁶ Without going deeper spiritually, we will be lost in what might feel like a “spin cycle” way of life. Life and ministry will seem impossible for us to manage and control, for we experience something of a split between “head and heart, public and private, professional and personal.”⁷⁷

The only possible way to fully embrace the magnitude of being “all in,” a consistent, totally devoted minister of the gospel in Christ, is to recognize our own

⁷⁴ Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 188-189.

⁷⁵ Hands and Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy*, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

spiritual poverty and deep need of Christ. “The beginning of healing...is in the acknowledgement of one’s pain and the unmanageability of one’s life. In spiritual terms, this is the recognition of true ‘poverty of spirit,’ of one’s utter neediness and dependence upon the bounty of God’s grace.”⁷⁸

Leading others into a new world will demand new grace from the Lord. This will take a longing for God and consecration of our desires. “To state it directly, we must come to love our longing.”⁷⁹ My longing must be based on a deeper love for God, more than any need of approval from others, or need for control, power, achievement, or any other thing which I may be tempted to embrace out of misplaced priorities or any unchecked longings.

Conclusion

In this section, I have attempted to present emotional keys for sustaining hope in the ministry. We have engaged in consideration of what is needed for emotional strength and stability to transcend the anxiety all around us. Self-differentiation while staying in touch with others who react negatively is essential. It takes courageous clarity and commitment to one’s values and goals and a willingness to take full responsibility for ourselves without blaming others. We must be willing to go first if necessary, even if others do not think we should go at all. To live this way is to imitate the life and love of Christ, who was despised and rejected, even as he endured the cross for all of us sinners.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ May, *Addiction and Grace*. 179.

Under the intense pressures of ministry, it is easy to become engulfed in the dangers of emotionally drifting to the dark side of obsessing about success. We reflect the dysfunction of our culture with longing to have success rather than accepting our condition of being all that God has intended us to be in Christ. Knowing Christ, knowing and sharing in His sufferings, and knowing the power of His resurrection is the ultimate objective of the humble servant, who is willing to give up everything to be content with an intimate relationship with Christ. It is painful to go through the process of discovering the truth about ourselves, which has some roots in our childhood and family of origin, but the shame and humiliation we may avoid in the process will make it all worthwhile.

Many of our choices are determined by the way we respond to our addictions and attachments. It is essential to ask the Lord for His help in order to not be enslaved to anything, as the Apostle Paul once prayed. Such attachments can lead to a need for more to be satisfied, the loss of willpower, the distortion of our attention, and more. Our best hope for overcoming these debilitating attachments is for us to choose to work in partnership with His grace to overcome them. Freedom does not come according to our human will, nor in simply turning it over completely to the Lord. It is necessary for us to join the Lord as a matter of the will and depend upon His grace for victory.

A sanctified way of life will inevitably lead to feelings of loss. Just as the Lord experienced loss on His journey, it will be important for us to learn and accept the way of the cross and the loss we must live with on this side of heaven in a fallen world. Reactive depression must be identified in order to be able to move forward with hope in our times of loss. With a renewed way of thinking, loss compared to knowing Christ can be viewed

as real, and yet not the end of all that is important in life. Again, we can ask the Father for His healing of our emotions and the grace to go on.

Leading others into new worlds of faith and kingdom living will require a level of self-differentiation beyond our own abilities. In fact, it is necessary to admit and accept our own spiritual poverty in order to position ourselves in a place where we are able to admit our need of the Lord. According to one translation, Jesus said “Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!”⁸⁰

My passion, my first love, must be for the Lord, for His glory and for His purposes. My longings, in order to be able to effectively lead others, must be for the Lord Himself, rather than for my own wants and needs. Only then will there be an open channel for the Lord’s grace to flow in redemptive ways in and through my life.

It is in Christ alone where we find hope for being able to be different as a leader and yet stay connected. In Christ, there is hope in dealing with our addictions and attachments. In Christ we have hope in the midst of loss, and the hope we need for all that it takes to lead others into a new world of faith. Therefore, let us keep looking to the Shining Light, as *Christian* was instructed by *Evangelist* in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.⁸¹

There are spiritual keys that can give us new hope in any situation, especially in the midst of our own doubts and feelings of inadequacy. This is the topic of this section in our search for transformational keys for sustaining hope in ministry.

⁸⁰ Matthew 5:3 (Good News Translation).

⁸¹ Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 15.

CHAPTER 6

SPIRITUAL KEYS FOR SUSTAINING HOPE IN MINISTRY

In the last two sections we have considered how to face challenges in ministry that are relational and emotional in nature. Now we will turn to consider some of the spiritual issues we face in our efforts to overcome burnout and feelings of hopelessness in ministry.

It is my experience that every minister knows that he or she is serving the Lord in enemy territory, or as Bonhoeffer says, “in the midst of our enemies.”¹ Following Christ will mean at times leaving places of status and comfort as Christ did not consider equality with God “something to be grasped” as we have seen in Philippians 2:6. For me this is a way of Christ that leads me to be willing to give up whatever the comfort and whenever the time it might be necessary, to go wherever God leads me into a spiritually dark and fallen world. This is what it means to follow Christ in an incarnational way of life, as we have already stated in the last section.

According to scriptures, our spiritual “enemies” are not the people in our lives or in our churches. They are not in denominational headquarters or in the church meeting rooms. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”²

In this passage, the Apostle Paul refers to demons, devils, and evil spirits. Those he was writing to believed in such spiritual forces, and many were terrified by the threat

¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17.

² Ephesians 6:12 (NIV).

they felt from spiritual forces of evil to do them harm.³ The words Paul used to describe them, such as powers and authorities, were different classes and names for the evil spirits. “To Paul, the whole universe was a battleground. The Christian had not only to contend with the attacks of men, he had to contend with the attacks of spiritual forces, which were fighting against God. We may not take Paul’s actual language literally, but from experience we do know this, that there is an active power of evil in this world.”⁴ While I cannot describe in full details what is the look or the nature of spiritual forces of evil, I am convinced that they are real. From my own experience I have come to believe that my struggle is with my own sinful desires, the world around me, and spiritual forces of evil that are working against the things of God.

Personal Responsibility and God’s Grace

Much of the trouble we face comes our way as a result of our own personal struggles with the temptations to follow after our own selfish longings and drifting spiritually away from God. James speaks of the issues that can lead us eventually into feelings of frustration, burnout, and a loss of hope.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of

³ Barclay, William. *The Letters to The Galatians and Ephesians*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 216.

⁴ Ibid.

the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, *it* says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble”.⁵

Here James points out the source of much of the conflict in our relationships with others. We engage in a “campaign to gain satisfaction . . . nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of its realization.”⁶ Even when we turn to God in prayer, the answer we hope for may not come to us, especially when we use prayer as a means of personal gratification “rather than to help others and please God.”⁷

This way of thinking leads to “spiritual unfaithfulness.”⁸ “It is to adopt the world’s set of values and want what the world wants instead of choosing according to divine standards.”⁹ This happens in ministry when we long for the gratification of our wants that may include approval, material gain, positions of power, and pleasures for ourselves more than to please God and care for others.

Our hope is found in James 4:6. “But He gives a greater grace.” The pull on us toward the things that can ruin us is great according to what James has said earlier in this passage. We are accountable and must accept our responsibility for following after our selfish desires. At the same time, we have this promise from the Lord for grace, greater than the demands He makes of us. “God has set a high standard for wholehearted love

⁵ James 4:1-6.

⁶ Burdick, Donald W. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 192.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

and devotion on the part of His people, but He gives grace that is greater than the rigorous demand He has made.”¹⁰

Here in this passage we discover at least two important realities in the matter of living a new way of life and sustaining hope. First, we are responsible and accountable for our own thoughts and actions. Second, we can choose to humble ourselves with a willingness to submit to God and receive grace that is greater than the challenges we face in overcoming all selfish desires that can control us and lead to despair.

Gerald May calls such desires attachments or addictions in his book *Addiction and Grace*. The distinction he makes between a controlling addiction and an emotional attachment is that addictions include “tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, self deception, loss of will power, and distortion of attention.”¹¹ A helpful insight into the effect of addictions and attachments is that “no addiction is good, and no attachment is beneficial...in that they impede human freedom and diminish the human spirit.”¹² May refers, of course, not to appropriate love for our fellow beings or God, but inappropriate emotional attachments to physical objects or pleasurable activities.

In this way, it is possible for the things we feel we must have to actually become significant barriers to the real joy and peace we long for. For example, in a quest for approval, it is possible to drive people away who become weary of trying to meet our needs. We do not receive because as James tells us, we go about the quest with selfish motives.

¹⁰ Burdick and Gaebeli, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, 194.

¹¹ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 26.

¹² *Ibid.* 39.

I can find encouragement with May's assertion that we all live with the bondage of addiction and the hope of grace.¹³ I can see the correlation between the call in James 4 to humble submission and the hope of God's grace in May's approach to finding a better way of life. "For the power of addiction to be overcome, human will must act in concert with divine will. Personal power must be aligned with the power of grace."¹⁴ My will to submit to the Lord's loving wishes and God's grace sets me free.

In this next section, we will focus on spiritual keys for sustaining hope in ministry as we face our own personal struggles while living behind enemy lines. There are spiritual principles and practices that can help us appropriate the grace needed for strength and wisdom to go on.

This is Serious

Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr are theologians and counselors to hundreds of men and women in the ministry. In their book *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy*, they tell us something which should be a warning for all in ministry. "Nearly all the clergy who have come to us for treatment of emotional disorders and/or addictions have also been suffering from a spiritual malaise. Many of them are at a point of estrangement from God, with scarcely any genuine personal relationship to the Mystery that they proclaim to others."¹⁵ Our spiritual disposition is a vital factor in our ability to benefit from biblical

¹³ May, *Addiction and Grace*, iv.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵ Hands and Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy*, 13.

encouragement, historical inspiration, relational support, and emotional health in sustaining hope in ministry.

We can be right where the Lord wants us to be and still have feelings of weakness, fatigue, loss, and despair. While it is not always the case that there may be a spiritual problem or disconnect in the midst of burnout, it is wise for us to examine our spiritual habits when there is little or no emotional vitality.

This is the danger of running harder and faster, doing more and more in order to try to please others and ourselves, without making time for the Lord to change us through life-giving community with those who will be used by God to help carry the load. In addition, we are going to consider how intentional spiritual practices can help us draw nearer to God and appropriate His grace for a new way of life in ministry.

There is hope. “Though we must act, the resources for spiritual formation extend far beyond the human. They come from the interactive presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who place their confidence in Christ. They also come from the spiritual treasures – people, events, traditions, teachings – stored in the body of Christ’s people on earth, past and present.”¹⁶ When hope is fading, it is the Lord’s desire to help us experience rest in the midst of our labor and give us grace to go on.

Grace To Grow Through Spiritual Practices

As I grew up with an elementary faith in God, I had not read any of the spiritual classics nor studied the spiritual disciplines in any depth. While that was true, even

¹⁶ Willard, Dallas. *Renovation Of The Heart: Putting On the Character Of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 23.

though I had no language for it, spiritual formation for me was the result of spiritual exercises that renewed my spirit, sharpened my focus, and allowed me to find rest. I spent time in prayer, study, and solitude. I was energized by serving the Lord and others. I began fasting according to the scriptures, at times, when I needed greater spiritual strength for a task. I had not been taught the value of spiritual disciplines, but I have come to realize that in some phenomenal way they position us in a place to better appropriate God's amazing grace. "God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us."¹⁷ Spiritual discipline is simply presenting ourselves to God on a daily basis, as we have said in our discussion of Romans 12:1, 2 in the Biblical section, in order that in His love He might transform us.

Jesus has given us an answer for dealing with burnout and renewing our spiritual vitality in Luke 10:25-28, when he responds to a question about how to appropriate eternal life. He answers by giving directives on how to live here and now in order to have eternal life.

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" You shall love the Lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."¹⁸

This passage is a call from the Lord to be fully engaged relationally with God and the people in our lives. Loving God with all of our heart, soul, and mind "are not

¹⁷Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 7.

¹⁸Luke 10:25-28.

mutually exclusive, but overlapping categories, together demanding our love for God to come from our whole person, every faculty and capacity.”¹⁹ In addition to loving God with all of our being, this command includes taking action to fully love others. Loving one’s neighbor is a call to love “anyone who needs our help.”²⁰ While none of us do this completely all the time, with God’s forgiveness and grace, we are able to take up the Lord’s challenge by faith.

In Ephesians 2:8 and 9, we are presented with the reality that we all are in need of God’s grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

“Grace,” as it is used here and in other places of Paul’s writing, defines not only “the past act of God initiating into a life of faith but also present continuing experience of divine enablings.”²¹ We not only depend upon the grace of God to forgive us and allow us to have a relationship with Him by Christ’s death on the cross; we also rely on His grace to enable us to show love toward others.

This grace has several meanings for us in the Apostle Paul’s writings to believers in his letters found in the New Testament. Dunn gives insights into Paul’s intentions when he uses the term “grace.”²² First, it is used as a reference to God’s spontaneous kindness and generous giving. A second common feature is the idea of grace in action. It

¹⁹ Liefeld and Gaebelien, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, 464.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988, 320.

²² Dunn, James D.G., *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 322- 323.

denoted not simply an attitude or a disposition but also the act which expressed the attitude ... “grace” was a dynamic concept, the powerful action of God. The third way in which Paul uses this term is to speak in the plural form when he refers to the favors or the benefactions given to us in our time of need. A fourth use of “grace” Dunn describes is the overflowing nature of God’s goodness to us all. “No room is left for any thought that the human recipient of divine grace can somehow repay it ... grace remains God’s wholly generous and undeserved action from beginning to end.”²³ While we can never repay all that God has given us, we still are enabled by the Lord to show similar grace and kindness to others in community. “We can say that grace begets grace ... the reception of God’s grace in Christ results in gracious acts ... as a gift to the community, a benefit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). The character of divine grace in Christ was fully recognized and responded to when the recipient became a vehicle of that same grace to others (2 Corinthians 8:9).”²⁴ It is only by God’s grace that we are able to love Him and others as ourselves. Such a gift to us becomes the means by which we are able to experience a new and better way of life in ministry.

Do This and Live

In the Lord’s response to the lawyer’s question, He offers us a better way of life in ministry. He simply calls us to pursue God with all of our being, and love others with the kind of care and attention we give ourselves. He is making a case for loving God and others as ourselves for being the best way to live.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

As you consider Christ's loving invitation in Matthew 11:28-30, it could be said that this type of spiritual formation is "in practice the way of rest for the weary and overloaded, of the easy yoke and the light burden".²⁵ We will look at the implications of this invitation for spiritual formation later when we consider what Willard entitles one of his chapters in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, "The Call of the Easy Yoke."²⁶

The Spirit and The Disciplines

Spiritual practices in themselves have no power to make a difference in our lives. Spiritual disciplines can become mere forms of religion, empty of any real power, and may actually become mere substitutes for real spiritual communion in Christ. As the Word says regarding our limitations, it is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts."²⁷ James Bryan Smith comments in his recent book, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, that the Spirit is indeed the primary source of all spiritual formation. Without the help of the Spirit, we would have no hope for ministry that endures and fulfills the Lord's calling in our lives. Theological support for our need of the Holy Spirit for spiritual *vitality* comes from the Word of God. According to George Pardington, in

²⁵ Willard, *Renovation Of The Heart*, 24.

²⁶ Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of The Disciplines*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers,1991), 1-10.

²⁷ Zechariah 4:6.

his *Outline Studies in Christian Doctrine*, the work of the Holy Spirit is set forth in the following topics with scriptural references:²⁸

- Changes the direction of one's life – John 3:5
- Connects God and the believer in an intimate relationship – 2 Thessalonians 2:13
- Provides freedom from sin and death – Romans 8:2
- Strengthens with power – Ephesians 3:16
- Creates sonship – Romans 8:14
- Witnesses to sonship – Romans 8:16
- Produces fruit – Galatians 5:22, 23
- Guides into all truth – John 16:13
- Divine remembrance – John 14:26
- Reveals and helps us apply the deep things of God – 1 Corinthians 2:9-14
- Gives power to communicate truth – Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 2:1-4
- Guides in prayer – Romans 8:26, Ephesians 6:18
- Inspires thanksgiving – Ephesians 5:18-20
- Inspires worship – Philippians 3:3
- Separates for definite service – Acts 13:2-4
- Guides in the details of life – Acts 8:27-29
- Gives new life to our mortal bodies – Romans 8:11

While this list is significant in its scope of detail regarding the work of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to fully define the infinite depth and width of the work of the Spirit. It is sufficient to say that a new way of life in ministry and sustaining hope in the midst of burnout is only possible by the love and power of the Holy Spirit. He is the ultimate change agent.

The mind, the disciplines, and the community are foundational aspects of change, but the real change agent is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit leads us to Jesus, reveals the Father, exposes falsehood, offers correction, and gives us the needed encouragement that make growth and transformation possible. The Spirit helps us change our narratives by leading us into

²⁸ Pardington, George P. *Outline Studies in Christian Doctrine*. (Harrisburgh, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1926), 311-312.

truth, enlightens us as we practice the disciplines, and binds us together in community.²⁹

A Pattern for Growth

I have found it helpful to learn from Willard what he calls a pattern for growth. It is a three-step process which can help guide us in the process of spiritual formation. The steps include vision, intention, and means: VIM.³⁰ There is presented to us in the Word and by the Spirit a vision of Christ and what it might mean for me to follow Him. At some point, by faith and with God's grace we make an intentional decision to follow Christ.

“Then the vision and the solid intention to obey Christ will naturally lead to seeking out and applying the means to that end. Here the means in question are the means for spiritual formation, for the replacing of the inner character of the “lost”³¹ with the inner character of Jesus: his vision, understanding, feelings, decisions, and character. In finding such means we are not left to ourselves but have rich resources available to us in the example and teachings of Jesus, in the Scriptures generally, and in his people.”³²

As noted above, I did not know about spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines theologically when I began seeking the Lord as a child. But I did receive from the word

²⁹Smith, James Bryan. *The Good And Beautiful Life- Putting On The Character Of Christ* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Books, 2009), 12.

³⁰ Willard, *Renovation of The Heart*, 85-90.

³¹ Willard, *Renovation of The Heart*, 55. Willard defines “lost” as being out of place. The place for the lost in the New Testament was often called “Gehenna”, a term that is best defined as a cosmic dump. “When we are lost to God, we are not where we are supposed to be in His world and hence are not caught up in His life.”

³² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 89.

and Christ's teaching a vision of what my life could be like. It became my intention to discover all that I could by God's grace in order to experience all that I could of Christ and His kingdom. Through various spiritual practices of prayer, worship, solitude, etc. I discovered the means for personal renewal and spiritual growth. This process followed the Vision, Intention, and Means, even though I had never heard of this pattern for growth and Christian development.

Various Approaches for Spiritual Disciplines

There are many ways to seek the Lord through spiritual practices. Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, shares his insights on the path to spiritual growth, using a threefold approach. He gives easy access to the inward disciplines, including meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. In addition, he presents the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. His third type of disciplines includes corporate disciplines of celebration, worship, guidance, and celebration. He calls them "classical Disciplines" not only because they are ancient, having been "practiced by sincere people over the centuries," but also because they are "central to experiential Christianity," having been useful and affirmed by the devotional masters over time.³³

Dallas Willard, in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, divides the spiritual practices into two categories, disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement.³⁴ Within these two categories, Willard includes most of the same practices as Foster in *Celebration of*

³³Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline- The Path to Spiritual Growth*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 1.

³⁴ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 158.

Discipline. Another book leaders seeking alternative disciplines may wish to read is *Off-Road Disciplines* by Earl Creps. His purpose is to focus on spiritual practices which help those who wish to follow Christ with a sense of mission in life. He divides the spiritual practices into personal and organizational categories. “The off-road disciplines serve the function of making space in our lives so that Jesus assumes the central position within us and the Spirit conforms us to the mission.”³⁵

According to James Bryan Smith’s model, spiritual formation involves four components, each necessary for renewing our minds and our hopes in ministry. **The Spirit** is the change agent who equips us with the power to persevere under the pressures of ministry. **The personal narratives** we come to believe, based on the truth of God’s Word, are able to renew our minds. **The community** of faith is essential to help us know ourselves for who we really are and minister to one another in the love of Christ. **The spiritual exercises** help us to be in a place to go deeper in our intimacy with Christ and receive His grace. According to Smith, these four components form a model for spiritual formation, and his Apprentice Series is built on this model.³⁶

Seeking God’s help and guidance according to the ways of Christ will lead us into a healthier way of doing ministry, into the way of rest and “the easy yoke” promised in Matthew 11:28-30. “The secret of the easy yoke, then is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives, how to invest time and our energies of mind and body as he did. We must learn how to follow his preparations, the disciplines for life in God’s rule that enabled

³⁵ Creps, Earl. *Off-Road Disciplines*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xvi.

³⁶ Smith, *Good and Beautiful Life*, 12.

him to receive his Father's constant and effective support while doing his will."³⁷ We learn from Him the means for serving the Father without burning out, even when the load is impossible for us to carry in our own strength. This is an amazing mystery to think that following Christ, incorporating His ways into our own daily life, is actually a pro-active way to peace and rest.

All of our lack of understanding doesn't cancel His offer of an easy yoke and a light burden, in which our souls can find rest. That offer, like His call to follow Him, is clearly made to us here and now, in the midst of this life where we labor and bear impossible burdens and cry out for rest. It's true. It's real. We have only to grasp the secret of entering into that easy yoke.³⁸

In the next sections, we will look at the scriptural basis for each of the four components in Smith's model and give supporting comments from persons who are well known for their leadership in spiritual development in becoming more like Christ by grace through the disciplines. Within these components of spiritual formation, there are important keys for sustaining hope, rather than quitting as a result of failures or feelings of inadequacies and burnout.

Hope through the Holy Spirit

It is easy to get so caught up in trying to survive the pressures of ministry that we wear ourselves out just striving to keep our heads up above the sinking sands of despair. It may be necessary for us to reach the end of ourselves before we are willing to seek the one true source of spiritual energy and hope, which is the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 9.

³⁸ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 3.

“Spiritual life is life in the Spirit, or more accurately the life of the Spirit in us. It is this spiritual life that allows us to live with a new mind.”³⁹ It may be our own pride, or it may be the influence of the Deceiver that keeps us from calling upon the Spirit to fill us with himself and take control of our lives.

Christ has shown us the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in His own life and in His teachings. The Spirit may lead us into times and places of testing and spiritual struggles as He led Christ into the wilderness. “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.”⁴⁰ Filled with the Spirit, Christ was able to withstand the Devil’s attacks. “God is one. But we know His three faces as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Satan is one also. And he comes to us as an unholy Trinity saying as he does to Jesus here ‘Take care of yourself’ ‘Be successful’ and ‘Seek the spotlight.’⁴¹

Luke goes on to say, “So Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee ... He kept teaching in their synagogues, and He was held in high reputation by all.”⁴² The same Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness where He was tested also led Him by His power into the place of respect and fruitful ministry. “This period of Jesus’ ministry has been called the Galilean springtime. He had come like a breath of the very wind of

³⁹Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Compassion*, 103-104.

⁴⁰ Luke 4:1.

⁴¹Larson, Bruce. *The Communicator's Commentary*, vol.3, ed. by Loyd J. Ogilvie (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 87.

⁴²Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Luke*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 42.

God.”⁴³ By the Spirit we have this same hope that our times of testing and struggle may be followed by times of new life in ministry, and a fresh breath of God to sustain us.

The journey to a new way of life in ministry, and the ability to sustain hope in the midst of burnout, is ultimately by His Spirit. It makes sense, then, that God commands us to “be filled with His Spirit.”⁴⁴

It is only by His Spirit that we are able to experience freedom and victory over the sins and troubles of the flesh. Paul wrote, “I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh, for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.”⁴⁵ The word for flesh, *sarx*, came to mean in the time of its use in the New Testament “all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God’s grace in his life.”⁴⁶ It is the Spirit of God, “who takes up residence in Christians to enable them to understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14), receive Christ as Savior and Lord, call God “Father” (Romans 8:15) and develop a Christian personality. The Spirit ... is thus the presence of God in the man through which fellowship with God is made possible and power given for winning the warfare against sin.”⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit enables us to overcome the challenges in life that lead to burnout and loss of hope. He makes victory possible to the degree that

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ephesians 5:18.

⁴⁵ Galatians 5:16-17.

⁴⁶ Boice and Gaebelien, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 494.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the believer “lives by the Spirit” or “walks in Him.”⁴⁸ The tense of the verb “walks” means a need for making a choice to continually walk in Him.⁴⁹

Henry Nouwen speaks of the need of the Holy Spirit above all else in his book, *The Only Necessary Thing*.

The Spirit of God is like our breath. God’s Spirit is more intimate in us than we are to ourselves. We might not often be aware of it, but without it, we cannot live ‘a spiritual life.’ It is the Holy Spirit of God who prays in us, who offers us the gifts of love, forgiveness, kindness, goodness, gentleness, peace, and joy. It is the Holy Spirit who offers us the life that death cannot destroy.⁵⁰

Our living hope is in Christ through the presence, power, direction, fruit, and gifts of His Holy Spirit. “We need to be leaders who are willing to embrace our weaknesses – those presently unusable aspects of our personality – and to allow God, through the catalyst of the Holy Spirit working in and with us to begin composting them into the spiritual humus from which our most powerful and fruitful ministry will come.”⁵¹ The best we can do in order to sustain any hope for ourselves and in our ministries is to seek the Lord immediately and ask to be filled with His Spirit. The Spirit will be freely given to them that ask. We have the Lord’s word on it. It is ultimately through spiritual practices that we ask and are able to be filled with the Spirit.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Only Necessary Thing*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 58.

⁵¹ McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, 162.

Hope through Spiritual Practices

God has given us His directives in this passage in 2 Peter, chapter 1 on how to come to a deeper, more intimate knowledge of the Lord that can change our feelings of failure and loss into a fruitful life and joyful ministry. Notice the spiritual practices referenced in this passage.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵²

Commenting on this scripture, Willard helps us make a connection between spiritual practices and a life-giving relationship to Christ. There by God's grace we receive "more of His life and power without harm to ourselves or others."⁵³ It is necessary for us to turn our longings toward God in order to enter into a more intimate relationship with the Lord and discover the hope that is ours in Christ. Turning toward God is, in itself, an act of prayer.

One needing greater hope may not feel capable of much more than simply "waiting in love" for the Lord as Richard Rohr suggests. Would not God, in His infinite mercy, respond to such an unspoken prayer from one longing for the new life that only Christ can give?

For Jesus, prayer seems to be a matter of waiting in love. Returning to love. Trusting that love is the bottom stream of reality. That's why prayer

⁵² 2 Peter 1:5-8.

⁵³ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 156.

isn't primarily words; it is primarily a place, an attitude, a stance. That's why Paul could say, 'Pray without ceasing.' 'Pray unceasingly.' If we read that as requiring words, it is impossible... We can pray unceasingly, however, if we find the stream and know how to wade in the waters. The stream will flow through us, and all we have to do is consciously stay there.⁵⁴

Dallas Willard, in *Renovation of the Heart*, gives valuable insight concerning the value of spiritual disciplines as useful instruments in helping us deal with some of the emotional challenges we face each day in ministry. Through spiritual disciplines we discover the “knowledge of our Lord” which will allow us to face each trial with honesty and grace.

A major service of spiritual disciplines—such as solitude (being alone with God for long periods of time), fasting (learning freedom from God and how God directly nourishes us), worship (adoration of God.), and service (doing good for others with no thought of ourselves)—is to cause the duplicity and malice that is buried in our will and character to surface and be dealt with. Those disciplines make room for the Word and the Spirit to work in us, and they permit destructive feelings—feelings that are usually veiled by standard practices and circumstances and by long accepted rationalizations—to be perceived and dealt with for what they are: our will and not God's will. Those feelings are normally clothed in layer upon layer of habitual self-deception and rationalization. Typically they will have enslaved the will, and in turn will have coerced the mind to conceal or rationalize what is really going on.⁵⁵

These are the spiritual exercises needed for dealing with our attachments, and our justification for those attachments. This is why it is almost frightening at times to engage in the disciplines. In them, we humbly draw nearer to God, nearer to the truth, and may tremble in fear for what we might find. Our spiritual Enemy can make us believe that we

⁵⁴ Rohr, Richard. *Everything Belongs - the Gift of Contemplative Prayer*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing company, 2003), 81.

⁵⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 155.

would be utterly ashamed and never want to go there. However, God is faithful never to leave us nor forsake us. In His presence, we find His perfect love and grace, which is able to heal the brokenness, transform our hearts, renew our lives, and sustain our hope in ministry.

“As you engage in your spiritual disciplines and spend time with God, giving your prayerful attention to those less desirable aspects of your personality under the catalytic guidance of the Holy Spirit, an amazing transformation will begin to take place. You will begin to witness what only God can do.”⁵⁶ This can be a great source of hope, when you know that with God change is really possible.

“To live as a child of God is to live with love and hope and growth, but it is also to live with longing, with aching for a fullness of love that is never quite within our grasp. As attachments lighten and idols fall, we will enjoy increasing freedom. But at the same time our hearts will feel an even greater, purer, deeper ache. This particular pain is one that never leaves us.”⁵⁷

We have reasons to celebrate spiritual growth and victories through Christ over “the flesh,” which was defined earlier in this section as “all that is evil in man.” Still, there will be an on-going sense of pain on this side of heaven. It is as Paul wrote to the Romans, “We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”⁵⁸ This is a reference to

⁵⁶ McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side*, 163.

⁵⁷ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 180.

⁵⁸ Romans 8:23.

our longing for the full bodily resurrection, when “we will be like the one who has provided redemption,” and our salvation will be complete.⁵⁹

Hope in the Spiritual Community

I must admit that, because of my personality type as an introvert, and because of my experiences in community, this is perhaps where I have had the most difficulty in finding joy or sustaining hope. I think it is because this is where I have experienced the most pain in my life and ministry. I never felt good enough while growing up. Not much changed as I accepted God’s call into pastoral ministry. I have always received support and words of encouragement, but the Adversary seems to know how to remind me that I am not quite good enough. I may get an evaluation back with less support than I had been hearing. I discover that there are some in the church who just don’t like my style of ministry or preaching. There are those who wish I would leave, in order that they could find someone new. “We are able to do many hard things, tolerate many conflicts, overcome many obstacles, and persevere under many pressures, but when we no longer experience ourselves as part of a caring, supporting, praying community, we quickly lose faith ... The crises in the lives of many caring Christians today are closely connected with deep feelings of not belonging.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Harrison and Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 95.

⁶⁰ Nouwen, *Compassion-A Reflection*, 59.

At one of my lowest points, soon after I had accepted a call into the ministry and was feeling like a failure, I read a piece from Francis Roberts. It helps me to remember who I serve, the Lover of My Soul.

Be obedient: ye shall bring joy to my heart. Neither the applause nor the scorn of men should be of any consequence to thee. My approval is reward enough, and without this, any other satisfaction is not worthy of thy pursuit. Walk on with me. I shall be very near to give thee support and encouragement, so thou wilt have nothing to warrant thy fears. They shall vanish as ye obey.⁶¹

In order to keep my balance here, I have had to ask myself, “What does the Lord require of me?” From His Word I find he requires justice, mercy, and faithfulness. He commands me to love Him with all of my heart, and my neighbor as myself.⁶² God’s love in my life is what drives me back into community, as indicated in this passage found in 1 John 4.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love, does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.⁶³

The challenge I need comes to me from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who knew first-hand the experience of loneliness in a jail cell in Germany. “It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God that any

⁶¹Roberts, Frances J. *Come Away My Beloved*. (Ojai, CA: King's Farspan., 2001), 19.

⁶²Matthew 23:33; Mathew 22:39.

⁶³1 John 4:7-12 (English Standard Version).

day may be taken from us...it is grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”⁶⁴

In this statement, I am reminded that the brethren are gifts from the Lord. Although they may occasionally give us trouble, they are still often the very means by which Christ may come to us, and give what we most need at the moment.

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ... The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s heart is sure.⁶⁵

The very hope I long for may come to me, and does in fact often come to me, through the community I am tempted to distrust and avoid if I could. It is by faith that I move into the community I sometimes fear and yet I need. My confidence is in the Lord. This life I live by faith, “yet not I, but Christ” helps me to do what I would not do in my own strength.

My hope is ultimately in Christ and the power he gives to live a life that is spiritually different than this world of selfishness, greed, hatred, pride, and oppression. I am someone who has been changed by the sacrificial love and forgiveness of Christ, who dwells within me, as I have been saying throughout this paper. His life in me is not merely a model to live by, but also a source of love and strength within me to show love

⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20.

⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 22-23.

and grace toward others. Paul wrote about how we have been transferred by God from the dark ways of this world to a new way of life and love in Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:13, 14 says, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”⁶⁶ Howard Dunn speaks of being transferred to “the kingdom of His beloved Son” as the experience of being raised up from spiritual darkness into new life, with the likeness of Christ’s resurrection to kingship.⁶⁷ This rescue maneuver by our Heavenly Father to a new way of life gives us hope in ministry, even in the darkness of burnout.

The fact that Christ dwells in me makes all of the difference in the world when I consider how I relate to others. “As a person Christ dwells in and delights in, as a splendid story of grace, I am sacred, set apart for God, special and empowered by the same power that raised Christ from the dead (Romans 6:3,4). I am sacred and I am strong, and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).”⁶⁸

Sustaining hope in community, as in accomplishing anything of the Lord, is only by His grace and power, “We can only love, forgive, serve, bless, give, encourage, unite, and have patience because we know who we are and where we live. We can do these things because Messiah Jesus has done them. We are empowered by not only His example but his life and strength. We do what he did because we are learning how to be with him in order to become like him.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Colossians 1:13-14.

⁶⁷ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 1988.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Good and Beautiful Community*, 15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

In Christian community, we are able to experience the ways of Christ and the power of Christ, which can lead us together into realms of His peace, love, and hope that have eluded us in our futile, solitary efforts. “We love, serve, forgive and care for others because God first loved, served, forgave and cared for us. The life with God we are now living is simply spilling onto everyone we meet.”⁷⁰

Nouwen says, “In the community of faith we can find the climate and the support to sustain and deepen our prayer, and we are enabled to constantly look forward beyond our immediate and often narrowing private needs. The community of faith offers protective boundaries within which we can listen to our deepest longings, not to indulge in morbid introspection, but to find our God to whom they point.”⁷¹ Here is how this speaks to me. When there seems to be nothing left to give, and I may be tempted to distance myself from others, rather than to be vulnerable, the hope I long for may be waiting for me, not only in Christ, but also in His people.

However, not all communities are healthy, as we all know. We can easily identify indicators of an unhealthy church. You can know them when the fruits of the Spirit are barely visible. Jesus said you are able to discern whether or not there is real spiritual life “by their fruits.” It is more difficult to find accurate indicators of a healthy church, since we can be going through spiritual exercises without any inner changes taking place in our lives.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁷¹ Nouwen, *Only Necessary Thing*, 123.

Peter Scazzero, in his excellent book *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, gives these characteristics of a healthy church.⁷² They look beneath with honesty about feelings, doubts, pains and hurts beneath the surface of our lives. They break the power of the past by taking responsibility and ownership for things in the past, rather than to blame others. They live in brokenness and vulnerability with humility to admit being wrong and open to constructive feedback and criticism for the good of the community. (See Appendix C for Scazzero's comparison of "Two Churches: Which Are You Most Like?") They are able to recognize and accept the reality of personal limits, and keep a balanced life of work, rest and play in a biblical way. Instead of ignoring or stuffing down feelings of loss, they embrace and express grief and loss, allowing God to work in and through it all. They make the incarnation of Christ the model for loving others well.

A rather painful reality for all of us in ministry is that we cannot lead where we are not willing to go ourselves. "The starting point for change in any nation, church, or ministry has always been the leader: As go the leaders, so goes the church."⁷³ An honest look inward can be a difficult if not a terrifying experience. "Most of us feel much more equipped to manipulate objects, control situations, and 'do' things than to take that very long journey inward."⁷⁴ And yet, as discussed in the next section, it is the mind that must be renewed. It is by our thoughts that we begin making our way back to the new life in Christ by God's grace.

⁷²Scazzero, Peter, and Bird, Warren. *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 59-66. In chapter 4, Scazzero takes the reader through an inventory of these indicators of spiritual and emotional maturity and health.

⁷³Scazzero and Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. 36.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 72.

Hope in the Renewing of the Mind

According to Dallas Willard, our first move back from ruined hopes must begin in the realm of our thoughts.

As we first turned away from God in our thoughts, so it is in our thoughts that the first movements toward the renovation of the heart occur. Thoughts are the place where we can and must begin to change. There the light of God first begins to move upon us through the word of Christ, and there the divine Spirit begins to direct our will to more and more thoughts that can provide the basis for choosing to realign ourselves with God and his Way.⁷⁵

It is crucial, in order to sustain our hope, that we be sure to focus our thoughts and attention on what is true, or real, not merely on what we have come to believe as true based on some false narratives we have learned along the way. It may be that just as an athlete must forget what he or she has learned from poor coaches before they can learn how to be better, we must reject some narratives which we have come to accept as truth. In order to go deeper in Christ, build better relationships with His people, serve more effectively, and have a stronger heart of faith and hope, it is essential to turn our eyes and mind toward Christ.

There are all kinds of narratives. Family narratives are the stories we learn from our immediate families . . . there are cultural narratives that we learn from growing up in a particular region of the world. From our culture we learn values (what is important, who is successful) in the form of stories of images . . . There are religious narratives – stories we hear from the pulpit, the classroom and religious books that help us understand who God is, what God wants of us and how we ought to live. Finally, there are Jesus' narratives, the stories and images Jesus tells to reveal the character of God.

⁷⁵ Willard, *Renovation, of the Heart*, 95.

We are shaped by our stories. In fact, our stories, once in place, determine much of our behavior without regard to their accuracy or helpfulness. Once these stories are stored in our minds, they stay there largely unchallenged until we die. And here is the main point: these narratives are running (and often ruining) our lives . . . Jesus' narratives are the truth. He himself is the truth. So, the key is adopting Jesus' narratives.

Our family, cultural, and even religious narratives might have their roots in the kingdom of this world. As Christ-followers, we are called to "set our minds on things that are above" (Colossians 3:2). Most of all, we are called to have the very mind of Jesus: "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Adopting Jesus' narratives is a way we come to have the mind of Christ. Once we get the right narratives in place, change will begin.⁷⁶

An important key for sustaining hope in ministry is to be delivered from destructive scripts, ideas, and images which may take root in our minds and may ruin our image of God and our own self-image. It is necessary for us to change the way we think and look at the world, ourselves, and God whenever hope begins to fade. Archibald Hart, an author and Christian psychotherapist, says that there can be real healing and change by seeking help from specialists. "The human mind is extremely complex, and the specialized research and study of how it works can help people heal and change . . . the best psychotherapy always has as its ultimate goal the realization of all that God intends for his heirs-spiritual as well as psychological."⁷⁷

Cognitive therapy is an approach of reconstructive therapy that "basically uses reasoning to modify beliefs and attitudes, and to improve logic. Victor Frankl's

⁷⁶ Smith, *Good and Beautiful God*, 25-26.

⁷⁷ Hart, *Coping with Depression*, 103.

Logotherapy and Glasser's *Reality Therapy* can be considered to be forms of cognitive therapy.⁷⁸

It is a proper understanding of truth which can empower us to reframe our own definition of reality and by God's grace be able to stay the course and fulfill our mission according to God's plan for our lives.

The process of spiritual formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing those destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus himself. We thereby come increasingly to see 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2Cor. 4:4, NRSV).

As we might expect ... the contrast between the idea system of humanity and the idea system of God is very sharp, because their fundamental assumptions (about who God is, and who we are) are totally different. Thus, the prophet Isaiah speaks: 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways', declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth. So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:8-9).⁷⁹

The renewing of my mind by the power of the Spirit, according to the Living and written Word of God, through prayer and spiritual practices, and with the support of the spiritual community around me, is essential for renewing and sustaining my hope in ministry. "The transformation of our thought life by taking on the mind of Christ – his ideas, images, information, and patterns of thinking – opens the way to deliverance of every dimension of the human self from the oppressive powers of darkness."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Hart, *Coping with Depression*, 104.

⁷⁹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 101-102.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 7

THEOLOGICAL KEYS FOR SUSTAINING HOPE

It has been said, “spirituality without theology becomes rootless, easily hijacked by individualistic consumerism.”¹ Both spirituality and theology are needed in order to have spiritual balance in our search for hope that is based on a firm foundation of biblical doctrine, as well as our experiences and the mysteries of the gospel. “Theology reminds spirituality that interpretation is intrinsic to experience.”² In other words, theology will help us keep our feet planted in biblical reality, as we engage ourselves in spiritual exercises and disciplines in the pursuit of real rest, peace, and hope in Christ.

“Theology comes from two Greek words, namely, *theos*, God and *logos*, speech or reason.”³ A working definition of *theology* is “a religious belief system about God or ultimate reality. Theology commonly refers to the ordered systematic study or interpretation of the Christian faith and experience of God based on God’s divine self-revelation. Theology also seeks to apply these truths to the full breadth of human experience and thought.”⁴

It is my intent to focus on the theological way God works personally in our lives according to scriptures, especially when we are tempted to think there is no hope. We

¹McIntosh, Mark A., *Mystical Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 10.

²Ibid., 14.

³Pardington, George P. *Outline Studies in Christian Doctrine* (Harrisburgh, PA: Christian Publications, 1926), 11.

⁴Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 113.

may think that experiencing new life in ministry and being useful to the Lord is over, not possible because of some failure or relentless feelings of inadequacy. Facing the challenge of going on may look too overwhelming, except for the hope that is ours found in an omnipotent God with infinite love and grace, as we have been saying in many ways throughout this paper. Our hope may also be renewed and sustained by our identity in Christ. To these sources of hope, we turn in the final pages.

How Long Must Hope Be Tested?

An Evangelical Friends missionary shared his testimony at a recent gathering of missions leaders, how he and his wife Andrea have dealt with deep feelings of grief and loss. He and his family were preparing to go to Cambodia, to serve with Evangelical Friends, when they were in an accident on the way home from a training experience in Colorado. Scott Sword, his wife Andrea, their seventeen-month-old son Isaac, and three friends were traveling to go hear Philip Yancey.

In that accident, just miles from the training site, a driver beside them lost consciousness and slammed into their van. Because of the angle at which he struck them, their van instantly flipped over and rolled multiple times. When it eventually came to rest, upside down, Scott was the only one still conscious. Two friends—Karin and Jessica—were killed in the rollover. Jessica was 21 years old and had been planning to spend two years as a missionary in Spain. Karin was in her mid-40s and had been working with Muslim immigrants in Europe. When other motorists reached Scott's son, he wasn't breathing. Though CPR emergency workers were able to transport him to a nearby hospital, little could be done. Isaac died the next day.

In a written version of his testimony, Scott Sword shared this outline of his thoughts with great eloquence and love, in the midst of his deep pain.

- In the days and weeks following our accident a single verse echoed repeatedly in my mind—Habakkuk 1:2. This is a verse that had always disturbed me. Habakkuk 1:2 “How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save.”
- During those initial days, this verse gave voice to the sense of total betrayal that I felt.
- Since marrying in 2001, Andrea and I had begun preparing for what we perceived to be God’s call to Cambodia. For seven years, we’d been heading in that direction. Then, just nine days prior to our scheduled departure, all this happened.
- I’m reminded of St. Teresa of Avila’s remark to God: “If this is how you treat your friends, it’s no wonder you have so few of them.”
- In the months that have followed, Andrea and I have been sustained by another section of Scripture—those psalms sometimes referred to as the Psalms of Lament.
- As we’ve lived with these psalms I’ve discovered that they frequently ask the same question voiced by Habakkuk. They ask, “How long?”
- For example, Psalm 13 repeats this question four times within the span of only two verses.
- “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?”
- These psalms have helped us to express our feelings of grief, confusion, and anger. But they’ve also helped us to direct these emotions to God; assuring us that he’s big enough to take it.
- In addition, the Psalms of Lament have reminded us of something else. They’ve reminded us that biblical faith is essentially a restless faith
- Biblical faith never passively accepts the existence of evil. It never sanctifies the status quo. Instead, it yearns for the total triumph of God over every force that opposes or undermines his will.
- We’ve been told that the intensity of our pain will subside. However, I’m certain that our questions will not.

- Nicholas Wolterstorff, a well-known Christian philosopher, but also a father whose son Eric was killed in a mountain climbing accident, writes: “To lament is to risk living with one’s deepest questions unanswered.”⁵

I have included Scott’s remarks in this for section for in his words I have been able to hear an eloquent expression of my own feelings of lament, and the deep cries of so many in ministry. Our losses may not have been as tragic, but the same questions haunt us on long days and in sleepless nights. With the Swords, with the Psalmist in God’s Word, with hopes at times fading, we call out to the Lord and ask, “How long?”

How long O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me?
 How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
 having sorrow in my heart all the day?
 How long will my enemy be exalted over me?
 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God.⁶

In His love the Lord gives us this language to speak of our worst days, our feelings of emptiness, what seems to be the Lord’s silence, a deeply broken heart, and the fear of ultimate defeat at the hands of those who come against us.

This language also opens the door for hope to come into our hearts, for it reveals our faith.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.

⁵ Sword, Scott. “CountThe Cost” Devotional message at Evangelical Friends Mission meeting in Woodland Park, Colorado, May 29, 2008.

⁶ Psalm 13, 1-3a.

The Most Important Thing About Us

A.W. Tozer wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God, is the most important thing about us . . . the most portentous fact about any man is not at what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.”⁷ Our hopes can be ruined or sustained, depending upon what we think God is like. It should be enough for us to be sure that no one has ever cared for us to the extent that He cares. He knows us completely and loves us still, while we are not worthy, enough to give His Son that we might be declared righteous in Him.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.⁸

While our feelings of self-worth can be crushed by the judgment of others, nothing can take away the reality of God’s love, which is not based on our performance, but rather demonstrated by what God has done for us “while we were still sinners.” “It was for sinners Christ died, for men who were neither righteous nor good. The contrast is between the tremendous worth of the life laid down and the unworthiness of those who stand to benefit from it. Back of the death of Christ for sinners is the love of God (v. 8); God loved; Christ died.”⁹

⁷ Tozer, A. W. *Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 9.

⁸ Romans 5:8-11.

⁹ Harrison and Gaebelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 59.

Not only are we going to survive through the things that steal our joy and rob us of hope, but because of God's active and infinite love and protection, we will thrive and ultimately, either in life or in death, overcome every form of adversity by His grace.

Romans 8:35-37 says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? -As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."¹⁰

The word used for "conquer" is used in a heightened form and can be translated this way. "We are winning a most glorious victory."¹¹ Another encouraging way this promised victory can be stated is in this way: "We win the supreme victory through him who loved us."¹² You and I will win some and lose some of the battles we go through, while attempting to be His faithful servants. Some days our efforts will feel like a waste, a total loss. But God assures us here that we will win the battles in life and in death, through Christ who leads us by His unfailing love. Our final reality in Christ will be an expression of God's perfect love, whether in this life now or later in life after death. No matter how dark and desperate may be our situation, God has promised to let nothing separate from His loving care. We have this life-giving assurance with the Apostle Paul, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."¹³

¹⁰ Romans 8:35-37 (NIV).

¹¹ Harrison and Graebelen, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 99.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Philippians 1:6.

Healing at the Turning Point

While I am encouraged by the keys for sustaining hope in ministry, as we have considered them in the Word, in history, in relationships, in emotional matters and in spiritual practices, I am still troubled by my own weakness. If it is up to me alone to appropriate hope, where do I turn if I have nothing left, empty of any strength to apply it to my life? At times, I am overwhelmed just by the contemplation of what to do next in order to not give up. Should I read more scripture, pray when I have no words, talk with Spirit-filled people who will tell me what to do but not how to be at rest in my soul?

I can relate to the father who needed the Lord's help with a troubling spirit in his son.¹⁴ The disciples could not cast it out. Only now, I find at times a troubling spirit of discouragement that will not go away. I hear the Lord's promises and the counselor's encouragement for those whose hopes are fading, and like the father, I ask Him to "take pity on us and help us."

"And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, 'I do believe, help me in my unbelief.'¹⁵ The father expressed faith, but also his honest need of the Lord's authority, strength, and mercy. He said, "I do believe," but "he recognized his faith was far from perfect (v.24). It was still mixed with unbelief.¹⁶ In a similar way, I can believe in God's Word, but my beliefs are also mixed with unbelief. In my frustrating humanity, I can take

¹⁴ Mark 9:17-25.

¹⁵ Mark 9:23-24.

¹⁶ Wessel, Walter W. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 703.

on adversity with trust, but my patience is also mixed with whining and complaining. I can love others with the love of Christ, but such love is also mixed with pride and a judgmental spirit. I must ask the Lord to help my unbelief, my lack of patience and love, my need for greater hope that is mixed with feelings of overwhelming inadequacy.

I begin to have more hope when I turn my attention to the mercy of God and His powerful embrace, which is able to penetrate or push back on my doubts and fears. I find in Jesus Christ a turning point I have longed for in my search for rest and peace.

There is a pivotal point here at which God comes to illumine just as much the weakness, fallibility, and misery of the world but now in a form which such a context can bear. And what is revealed there in greatest humility is the greatest majesty, the unfathomable mystery of rescuing love... Christ is the true coming forth of God to humanity, revelation itself.

And yet at this point the helpless child of peasant parents, the broken body on the cross, remind us that what Jesus unveils is revealed in painful darkness and unknowing; for what is unveiled is the most veiled, the most secret, the most mysterious – divine love which refuses to be God apart from what is most alienated from God. Jesus is the hidden pivot, the mystical turning point of the whole cosmic hierarchy, because in Him is revealed both the going out of God's love and its will to return with the lost in its embrace.¹⁷

What a wonderful thought to think of the Father sending His Son, with the intent of returning the lost, helping those without hope by holding us in His own embrace. I begin to see a plan in place with Christ as a saving turning point that gives me more hope. At the same time, there is this awareness of my inability to respond with appropriate faith and obedience to God's love in my own strength apart from God's grace.

The grace of God will enable us to wait for love to come in His time and in His way, for His purposes. An example of this is a time when the Apostle Paul had sought the Lord's healing in his life. After asking God several times to be healed, the Lord said to

¹⁷McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 52.

Paul, Paul heard this: “My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.”¹⁸ For Paul, “grace was a dynamic concept, the power action of God ... the dynamic experience of being grasped and embraced by God.”¹⁹

Where then shall we go to be healed in the midst of burnout? I can relate to Peter’s question of Christ. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”²⁰ We can do no better than to prayerfully seek and serve the Lord with faith. In Christ, we discover the reality of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who comes to us through Christ, and gives us the very life and power of Christ. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”²¹ “The presence and fullness of Christ are realized in the life of the Christian by means of the indwelling Spirit.”²²

This is truly a mystical union, a mystery of love and grace for sure. But my failure to fully understand the mystery does not mean I don’t get what the Spirit has to offer. “By arousing this *affectus* in the soul the Holy Spirit enables the soul to sense, by love, the hidden presence of Christ. The soul’s *affectus* (the Holy Spirit at work in the soul) leads it through the darkness into relationship with the desired Lord.”²³ You might say, “Simply

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:9.

¹⁹ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 322.

²⁰ John 6:68-69.

²¹ Romans 8:10-11.

²² Harrison and Gaebelien, *Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 90.

²³ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 171.

because I don't get it, does not mean I don't get it," and given my need for hope, I will gladly take it!

Not I, But Christ

I have discovered that what I read, no matter how inspiring, cannot save me. No matter what I profess doctrinally, I am still afraid. No matter what I have learned or come to understand about God, still I am lost and looking for hope. What gives me new hope for a new way of life in ministry is my confidence in Christ, "who loved me and gave himself up for me." Christ living in me gives me hope at all times. No matter who is disappointed by my failure or by my best efforts, Christ still dwells within me. I am still in Him, and He in me.

Galatians 2:20 presents this life-giving truth: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."²⁴ Here Paul is speaking in the context primarily of his past commitment to the law and the obligation to its ordinances compared to trust in the love of God and Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He is thinking here of the great spiritual harm of 'turning from the Savior to mere ordinances.'²⁵ No one can keep all the laws, therefore "law brings death,

²⁴ Galatians 2:20 (KJV).

²⁵ Harrison and Gaebelein, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 10, 451.

for by it all stand condemned.”²⁶ The love of God through Christ sets me free of the law and its judgment.

When Paul says, “I am crucified with Christ,” he is saying “he has died to law so that he might live for God. But this is true only because he has been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ, by God the Father.”²⁷ Instead of referring to annihilation of his life, he is referring to dying spiritually to the demands of law, which frustrate us with a call to perfection that is always beyond our reach. According to law, we have no chance of ever being good enough, but in Christ, we find mercy, forgiveness, grace, and life. It can be said of Paul and every believer, “The resurrection life he is living, he is now living through the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within him.”²⁸

The message of the Gospel documents is not simply a divine revelation with a human response required. In Jesus of Nazareth there is both a divine revelation and a human response, if one takes seriously the Incarnation. Both the divine revelation and the human response are predicated on the all-significant middle term, the divinely provided response in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ. In relation to human beings, his humanity is both representative and substitutionary in all our relations with God ‘such as trusting and obeying, understanding and knowing, loving and worshipping.’²⁹

In other words, hope is realized in Christ as I experience His resurrection power to trust, obey, understand, love, and worship. Such blessings are available to all those who have received Christ and believed in Him, those who are now given the right to

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kettler, Christian D. *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ And The Reality Of Salvation* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America 1991), 139.

become children of God. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”³⁰

To say that Jesus is our response to God will inevitably raise the question, “What then is *our* response to Him?” Are we no longer living out our own lives? “The vicarious humanity of Christ is not meant to destroy humanity, but to restore it.”³¹ The Word speaks to us of a need for faith and repentance, as well as humble service to others, which is required of us all. Dr. Chris Kettler has given this response to questions about our human responsibility in light of the vicarious humanity of Christ:

To reply that this leaves no place for a human response refuses to take seriously the seriousness and desperation of our situation. We are helpless and lost, unloved or at least loved only conditionally in a hostile world of which we contribute through our own selfishness and desire to be God. Yes, we are called to faith and repentance, but never apart from the one response to God in the humanity of Jesus Christ ... He is our human response to God especially in times of doubt and despair.³²

I have talked with Dr. Kettler for hours about the concept of Christ making up the difference of whatever God may ask of me, compared to what I might be able to give in response to His call. We have had these discussions in graduate studies with him as my instructor and also outside of class over lunch or coffee. While I cannot speak for Dr. Kettler, this thought helps me in my brokenness to see my response in Christ to God’s love as enabled and empowered by Christ to obey God’s commands, trusting Him for that which I cannot see accomplished except by His grace. Whenever necessary, I am

³⁰ John 1:12-13.

³¹ Kettler, *Vicarious Humanity of Christ*, 140.

³² Kettler, Christian D. *The God Who Believes Faith, Doubt, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2005), 192.

comforted and have more hope when I can breathe a simple prayer to the Lord who dwells within me: “Help me in my unbelief.”

Perhaps our need of Christ in attempting to face the demands of life and ministry is best presented in the following poetry by Anne Johnson Flint. Peter Scazzero found this prayer to be an encouragement at a difficult time in his ministry on his own “journey of brokenness and vulnerability.”³³

More Than I Asked and Better than My Best

I prayed for strength, and then I lost awhile
 All sense of nearness, human and divine;
 The love I leaned on failed and pierced my heart,
 The hands I clung to loosed themselves from mine;
 But while I swayed, weak, trembling, and alone,
 The everlasting arms upheld my own.

I prayed for light; the sun went down in clouds,
 The moon was darkened by a misty doubt,
 The stars of heaven were dimmed by earthly fears,
 And all my little candle flames burned out;
 But while I sat in shadow, wrapped in night,
 The face of Christ made all the darkness bright.

I prayed for peace, and dreamed of restful ease,
 A slumber free from pain, a hushed repose;
 Above my head the skies were black with storm,
 And fiercer grew the onslaught of my foes;

But while the battle raged, and wild winds blew,
 I heard His voice and perfect peace I knew.

I thank You, Lord, You were too wise to heed
 My feeble prayers, and answer as I sought,
 Since these rich gifts Your bounty has bestowed
 Have brought me more than all I asked or thought;

³³Scazzero, Peter and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 131.

Giver of good, so answer each request
With Your own giving, better than my best.³⁴

The reality of my own humanity is that there will always be both hope and despair, even in Christ. The despair of the inevitable cross was present with the Lord, even as He won incredible victories over sin and sorrow and even death. For the “joy set before Him, he endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2). A new way of life and ministry in Christ will include sacrifice and suffering for us just as it did for Christ and his followers. “The joy set before Him” is somewhat difficult to interpret. The “joy” could be referring to “the heavenly bliss the pre-incarnate Christ surrendered in order to take the way of the cross.”³⁵ A more plausible interpretation is to say Christ endured the cross because of the joy it would bring. “He looked right through the cross to the coming joy, the joy of bringing salvation to those He loves.”³⁶ Jesus was able to see the cross as a trial worth enduring for the sake of others. This gives me hope to know that Christ loves me that much, and that as I follow Christ’s example, lives can be changed and people may be moved to trust and follow Christ, if I am willing to endure any trial that Christ may ask of me. I am learning when hope is fading to look through it for the joy of helping others by whatever I am asked to endure.

The Apostle Paul articulates the reality of both joy and sorrow in this life for a follower of Christ in 2 Corinthians 6:8-10.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Morris, Leon. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 134.

³⁶ Ibid.

As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way; by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.³⁷

In this passage, we discover how the Apostle Paul was persecuted for his faith and style of ministry. However, Paul saw the validity of his ministry as an apostle in a different way from the people of Corinth. “Though they take offense at the weakness which characterized Paul’s apostolic ministry, he regarded this very weakness through which Christ’s power was mightily at work as divine authentication of his apostleship.”³⁸

In these contrasts, Paul gives us different points of view. “We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.” This shows the importance of reframing our perspective as was discussed in the section on emotional keys of sustaining hope. “The pairs of contrasts give the divine and the worldly assessment of apostolic life.”³⁹ From the world’s point of view, a servant of the Lord may appear to be an imposter, dying, being punished, sorrowful, poor and possessing nothing. But from the perspective of a servant in Christ in reality we are true, well-known, and

³⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:4-10.

³⁸ Volf, Judith M Gundry. *Paul And Perseverance : Staying In and Falling Away*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 234.

³⁹ Harris and Gaebelein, Expositors Bible Commentary, vol.10, 358.

alive. By grace, we are able find a reason for joy even in the worst of times, as in Christ's loving way for the sake of others. We may have nothing by the world's standards, and yet God has promised to supply our "every need according to His riches,"⁴⁰ which are infinite and ours in Christ Jesus.

Kettler is very helpful with this uneasy way of life that includes both joy and despair. "The temptation is either to ignore and repress despair or to simply live with an uneasy alliance between joy and despair. This is, of course, seen in the life of Jesus. The cross will always be with him, but never apart from the victory of the resurrection."⁴¹ Speaking of the Apostle Paul's experience, Kettler adds, "In realizing his poverty he is utterly dependent on Christ's vicarious faith and hope, and therefore joy. The problem of joy is not how to get rid of despair in order to be joyful but how to accept the sorrow and the joy together (without sorrow demanding equal billing with joy). We need Christ's vicarious sorrow and joy for this."⁴² It will always be in the midst of joy and sorrow that we experience in Christ the hope we need to go on. This is the simple reality for us all. We will continue to need God's grace to keep hope, with a divine perspective on what is real for us in Christ. Our joy will be sustainable if, in our weakness, we are able to be glad to reveal God's power, and if we can find a purpose in suffering for the sake of others.

⁴⁰ Philippians 4:19.

⁴¹ Kettler, Christian D. *The God Who Rejoices : Joy, Despair, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 144.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Continually in God's Story

If I am one with Christ then at all times I am living within God's story, which began centuries ago between the Creator and the creature. Karl Barth tells how the stories of our lives are woven into God's story on a daily basis and ultimately into a oneness with God through Christ.

In every breath we take, in every one of our thoughts, in every great and petty experience of our human lives, heaven and earth are side by side, greeting each other, attracting and repelling each other and yet belonging to one another, we are, in our existence, of which God is the Creator, a sign and indication, a promise of what ought to happen in creation and to creation—the meeting, the togetherness, the fellowship and in Jesus Christ, the oneness of Creator and creature.⁴³

Oneness through Christ with our Creator is another reason for hope. Chuck Conniry speaks of the genius of God who delights in variety saying, “In every instance the details of our relationship with Jesus Christ coalesce perfectly with the contours of our respective stories. . . God meets every person in the living of his or her life. God and we, in fact, have never had separate journeys, as the Psalmist says so well: ‘O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I go from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there, If I make my bed in the depths (some versions say “hell”) you are there’” (Psalm 139; 1,7,8).⁴⁴

From the words of the Psalmist we have to believe that for the Lord to be absent is to believe a lie, any way that you or the Enemy might try to spin it. The Lord cannot be contrary to His essence. If I am feeling far from God, it can never be because God has moved. Even if I run as fast and as far as possible from the Lord, even into hell (or

⁴³Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics In Outline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 64.

⁴⁴Conniry, *Soaring in the Spirit*, 11.

something that feels like it), still, he is there. He cannot be absent, and at the same time everywhere present. In our most hopeless condition, the Lord is still with us. What are the implications of this in the “contours of our respective stories”? If we are never on separate journeys, then we can say with complete assurance, “He is here! We are still together no matter what my emotions tell me or what others may be saying.”⁴⁵

Alone in the most frightening moments of our lives, He is here. Alone and facing a decision to withdraw life support, He is here. When I might not want to live any longer with the situation as it is, He is here with me. Scriptures allow us to believe that God is encountered in the immediacy of everyday life. Christ dwells within each one of us, and in this way is “closer than a brother”.⁴⁶

More hope can be found in the truth that no trials or troubles of this life are able to “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴⁷ A minister can say by faith, “I am never written out of the script of God’s story. I am living within the love of God in Christ, even on my worst days.”

Conclusion

Scott and Andrea Sword, still feeling the loss of friends and their child Isaac, continue to ask the Lord “How long?” How long will the ache go on? How long will the pain of suffering and loss continue to be a shadow in their lives and in their ministry? At the same time, they find some reassurance, if not in answers, in the Lord’s response to a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Proverbs 18:24.

⁴⁷ Romans 8: 32.

similar question from His followers in the early church. When asked about the future, Jesus responded by saying, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁴⁸

Scott went on to inspire all of us at that missions meeting with these words: “Our questions—and the questions of those early disciples—are not answered, but they are channeled and recast in the shape of a call. A call that extends to every one of us, each in different ways, a call to bear witness to the crucified, risen, and coming Christ: the one who has defeated the forces of sin, death, and the demonic, and who promises to someday put them under his feet forever.”

Choosing to live day by day with genuine faith “in the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself up for me,” I find hope, no matter what may be the uncertainties or the losses.

When you look attentively at your life, you will see how filled it has been with fears, especially fears of people in authority: your parents, your teachers, your bishops, your spiritual guides, even your friends. You never felt equal to them, and kept putting yourself down in front of them. For most of your life, you have felt as if you needed their permission to be yourself . . . Jesus came to free you from these bonds and to create in you a space where you can be with him . . . simply enter into the presence of Jesus as you are and ask him to give you a fearless heart . . . Let him transform you by his love and enable you to receive his affection in your whole being.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Acts 1:8.

⁴⁹ Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Inner Voice of Love : A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 40-41.

Paul says in Romans 12: 1 and 2, we will begin to experience this transformation as we present ourselves, our entire life and our relationships to God “as a living sacrifice” each new day.⁵⁰ Call upon the Holy Spirit in order to receive God’s grace to go on, even while troubling issues continue to drain us of our strength. Acknowledge the fears of being hurt by others to God and find persons who can both inspire and challenge us as well as give us love. Let us ask and depend on the Lord to renew our minds, as we by faith choose not to be conformed to the ways of the world. Then we will be better equipped to know or discern His perfect and acceptable will. This is not a new capacity to discern God’s will by rational means, but the integration of rationality within the total transformation of the person.”⁵¹ We will discover as we are being transformed that God’s will is good, acceptable, and perfect for each of us.⁵² It is a good fit for us according to God’s love for us.

In the midst of burnout, remember that more important than what others may think about us or even what we may feel about ourselves is what we think about God. We may have a troubled heart and be critical of ourselves wondering how God could love us. Remember, “God is greater than our heart and knows all things.”⁵³ He looks at us with infinite love and mercy. He knows all that Christ has done to save us and our response to Him. He will help us discover a new way of life in ministry in Jesus Christ.

Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 58-59. “He assuredly does not call upon them to offer up arms and legs on the sacrificial altar! His summons is rather that they should offer up themselves ... Paul makes extensive use of the body as a model of human cooperation and interrelationships.”

⁵¹ Ibid., 74.

⁵² Howard, *Newness of Life*, 211.

⁵³ 1 John 3:20.

Since He has shown us such great mercies, it is reasonable to commit all of ourselves and all of our relationships to Christ, presenting all that we are as a living sacrifice. At the same time, let us put our faith in Christ to be our turning point, as we claim our place of peace and hope in Him. When feeling overwhelmed for any reason, fall on Jesus and the comfort found in the reality that He indwells us and gives to us resurrection power to endure sorrow for God and the sake of others. When we have nothing based on what others think, or a perspective of low self-esteem and weakness, remember we still have all the riches in Christ. Keep in mind that we are still in the story of the movement of God's kingdom on earth. He has promised to answer a minister's prayer for strength to continue to serve instead of quitting. With Christ, we are never without hope.

CHAPTER 8

DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

We All Have Our Space Mountains

Engaging in an introspective evaluation and facing the limits of my own humanity in ministry, with much fear and trembling, reminds me of the first time my son went on the Space Mountain ride at Disneyland. (This is a roller coaster ride in the dark, inside a manmade mountain.) He was only ten years old.

He tried to convince himself that he was brave as we stood in line. His growing fears as he listened to the sounds which thundered from the openings in the “mountain” remind me of scary passages in unfamiliar books. The passages have pierced my soul with both excitement and fear as I realized that the Lord was taking me to places I had never been, filled with twists and turns that were perhaps both fearsome and life-giving.

The screams my son and I heard behind the walls as the people gripping one another screeched to a halt at the ends of their rides caused him to tense up and hold back from moving to the front of the line. Such moments remind me of sessions with grown men and women, weeping and holding on to each other as they revealed themselves to those who were once strangers. Now, as spiritual travelers, there is joy in the ride that took our breath away, at what we discovered in the darkness of our own fears, at times at a pace too much to bear.

I can better understand now why my son decided at the moment of getting on the ride to wait to see if his sister, who went first, would survive. When he saw her joy and

excitement a few minutes later, he could finally believe that such an adventure could be wonderful, in spite of the fear that still made his heart pound. With belief in his father and reassurance from his sister, he was willing to finally get on the roller coaster and race off into his fears just for the wonder of it all.

In the roller-coaster experiences of my life, I have traveled along, at times inches from the abyss. I have ventured forward with faith in my Father and the reassurance of brothers and sisters, who often have been more courageous than I. I have experienced some pain, have dealt with troubling yet important revelations, and even have had situations in which I was ready to scream. I wondered if the One running the ride could really be trusted with my life on the line. His love made me believe. His example, life, death, and resurrection gave me hope.

Rather than wonder what might have been, I have chosen to risk all that I have used in the past to keep me safe, and take the life-changing journey into the unfamiliar frontier of self-examination and deconstruction. Experience tells me that in Christ I discover a new way of life in ministry and sustaining hope in the midst of burnout.

A New Way of Life in Ministry Will Include Biblical Keys for Sustaining Hope

If Christ lives within us, we need not be defined by failure, rejection, abandonment, guilt, or death. For anyone in whom Christ dwells, there is the promise of mystery, redemption, peace, love, and hope, which ultimately define our destiny.

Early in my ministry, at the age of 26, I was asked to serve as an Associate Pastor of one of the largest churches in my denomination. This was a wonderful opportunity. The church had over 700 members and attendance was often over 1000 at Sunday

services. I was privileged to work with one of the most influential leaders in our denomination. This position opened doors for significant ministry not only in our denomination, but also in our community. I became known to city leaders, school staff, and served as a chaplain to the police department. I especially enjoyed presenting a weekly radio program that was heard in a large geographic area that went out to another state. It seemed I could not ask for more than these wonderful ministry opportunities at such a young age.

What I did not know was that the Sr. Pastor had cancer. It was discovered six months after I took the position. The excitement that came to me from the great ministry experiences could not compare to the stress and pain we experienced throughout the church. Nothing could be done. The cancer spread, and our great Sr. Pastor went to be with the Lord within eighteen months after I began my ministry there.

The grief and loss we all felt created an incredible amount of stress and heartache. It became difficult to lead this great congregation with my limited experience and my own feelings of loss. The people displayed symptoms of grief such as anger, guilt, confusion, isolation, and despair. Nothing I did was enough to satisfy the loss these good people were feeling. Everything we tried to do to go forward was understandably resisted. This dream job was becoming a painful nightmare.

In one of the times visiting our Sr. Pastor in the hospital, he and I discovered we were both holding on to the same hope found in God's Word in Philippians 3. Seeking help from the Lord in His Word helped me to survive those difficult days. We agreed with Paul concerning what was really important. Paul says, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I

count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus.”

Nothing we had experienced or achieved was as important as our intimate relationship with Christ. In addition, in the worst of times we have the assurance of the Christ’s resurrection power now and forever.

N.T. Wright, in *Surprised by Hope*, says this: “Hope for Christians, is not wishful thinking or blind optimism. It is a mode of knowing, a mode within which new things are possible, options are not shut down, new creation can happen.”¹ When we are at the end of our resources and strength, there we will find God’s grace, at times through the scriptures to go on. The Lord’s message to Paul when he had no answers is His word to ministers today who are all out of hope: “My grace is sufficient for you.”

A New Way of Life in Ministry Will Include Historical Keys for Sustaining Hope

From men of God who endured deep loss, like King David and the Apostle Paul, we have writings which have encouraged faithful believers over centuries of time, showing us the way to hope and victory. Their histories, as well as the stories of ministers enduring deep loss, give us confidence to believe that we too can rise above incredible injustice and suffering,

From 2002 to 2005, my wife and I were overwhelmed most of the time with the challenges of dealing with a 14-year-old young lady from Russia, who had many symptoms of a child with a reactive attachment disorder, with an inability to accept the love of a family and manage her anger. She resisted making herself vulnerable in her

¹ Mary Kate Morse, Class notes from a presentation in Dmin 532, October 28, 2010.

relationship with us, trying often to demonstrate that she did not need us, and would scheme to get her own way rather than to comply with family rules or standards.

We were her third family here in the States over a four-year period. She lied whenever it was useful, while at the same time tried to conform to a lifestyle of a Christian home. Our faith gave her hope. Her experience of God's love with us gave healing for some of her wounds, but she ran away from our home many times.

All of this and more factored into feeling physically, emotionally, and spiritually overwhelmed at home, while giving pastoral leadership in a church of about 300. My wife and I supported each other, and the people of our church were also generally supportive and understanding. At the same time, this presented a great strain on me and everyone in my life, including my two adult children not at home, and our church family. On some Sundays, we wept before our congregation, asking them to pray for us because we did not know where to find our daughter. Ultimately, it became necessary for us to relinquish our relationship with her as our parents, when she was not willing to stay with us, and made that clear to social services.

We found that in this time of heartache, anxiety, fears and incredible stress, the Lord was using this situation to demonstrate to others the Lord's strength and grace to persevere in response to our complete dependence upon Him. No matter what may be our feelings or circumstances, there will be times when the fruit of ministry comes forth out of the spiritually rich "dark" soil of suffering. The Lord may use such experiences to comfort and nourish others spiritually, as well as bring honor to Himself.

A New Way of Life in Ministry Will Include Relational Keys for Sustaining Hope

Hope will be sustained only by engaging others relationally in personal ways, as well as blessing them according to God's commands. God's commands are clear concerning how we are to relate to one another. As we discussed in the relational section of this paper, according to Bonhoeffer, "What God has done for us we owe to one another." This will include being kind, forgiving, caring, and serving one another. We will encourage others and respond to the hurts of others with mercy. We will make ourselves vulnerable as Jesus did for the sake of others.

At the same time, we must care for others in ways that are healthy. For a couple of reasons I have a habit of internalizing stress which seems apparent to me. One reason may be my own tendency toward self-rejection. I keep trying to disprove what I know to be true, which is that I am not perfect even though it feels like that is often the expectation of others. While caring for others, I must remember that Christ's command to love my neighbor includes a call to love myself.

Another concern I have had is to try to minimize the stress and trouble in trying situations. There are times when I can see pain mirrored in the looks of others, and it troubles me if I cannot spare them of it. I have felt an unhealthy responsibility *for* those around me, instead of a more appropriate responsibility *to* those in my life to be caring and respectful as I related to them in various situations.²

² Frank Green class notes in Dmin 511 course, October 23, 2008. Dr. Green spent significant time helping us to distinguish between healthy ways to show care and ways which can be dangerous to our own well being.

A meaningful and constructive place to start to be more effective in blessing others is to follow the principles in “the blessing,” as it was offered in the Old Testament. Esau sought this blessing from his father in Genesis 27:34. Esau pleaded with his father saying, “Bless me, even me also, O my father!” This way of blessing others is explained in a wonderful book by Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent. It is a way to offer unconditional love and approval, using the five elements of the blessing, including meaningful touch, a spoken message, attaching a high value, picturing a special future, and an active commitment.³ People all around us are longing for such a blessing from us. Galatians 6:2 gives an important key for a new way of life in ministry and sustaining hope: “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” This is the way of love in Christ.

A New Way of Life in Ministry Will Include Emotional Keys for Sustaining Hope

We have engaged in consideration of what is needed for emotional strength and stability to transcend the anxiety all around us. Self-differentiation while staying in touch with others who react negatively is a requirement for this new paradigm for hope. It takes courageous clarity and commitment to one’s values and goals, and a willingness to take full responsibility for our own actions and behavior.

Archibald Hart says that most of our lives are lived at a hectic pace, driven by the need to succeed and prove ourselves in ways which can lead to high blood pressure, chronic fatigue syndrome, and even a heart attack. We can be driven to be perfect and not

³ Trent, John and Smalley, Gary. *The Blessing*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1993), 29.

very willing to accept failure. We are in a profession of constant adrenaline arousal in our work, going from extreme emotional highs to helping someone deal with a load of sorrow, grief, or shame. There can be a addictive longing of self-importance.

It is helpful for me to hear May say that the only way to get past the addictive behavior which I learned as a child is to realize that “an authentic struggle with attachment must involve deprivation. We have to go hungry and unsatisfied; we have to ache for something. To state it directly, we must come to love our longing”.⁴ I long to be free of the way of life which demands that I must be perfect, never failing, never slow, never weak, and never afraid. I long to be able to accept my own humanity, in order that I might be set free from the constant stress of fighting a battle, which the Lord has never meant for me to fight. May goes on to say, “To struggle to transcend any idol is to touch the sacred hunger God has given us.”⁵ By God’s grace, I am willing to love the longing, to accept the hunger for God’s best to be free from the stressful ways I have been living my life.

A sanctified way of life will inevitably lead to feelings of loss. Just as the Lord experienced loss on His journey, it will be important for us to learn and accept the way of the cross and the loss we must live with on this side of heaven in a fallen world. Reactive depression must be identified in order to be able to move forward with hope in our times of grief and loss. With a renewed way of thinking, loss compared to knowing Christ can be viewed as real, and yet not the end of all that is important in life. Again, we can ask the Father for His healing of our emotions and the grace to go on.

⁴ May, *Addiction and Grace*. 179

⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

A New Way of Life in Ministry Includes Spiritual and Theological Keys for Sustaining Hope

We strengthen our resolve and discover a better way to hold on to life-giving hope in the spiritual practice of calling upon the Holy Spirit and using spiritual exercises that will position us to receive God's grace to go on. We must ignore the fears that can inhibit our ability to receive His love and the love He sends to us through others. As Nouwen suggests, "Simply enter into the presence of Jesus as you are and ask him to give you a fearless heart . . . Let him transform you by his love and enable you to receive his affection in your whole being."⁶

Unlike so many ministers who live in quiet isolation, we can find persons who can both inspire and challenge us as well as give us love. We can ask the Lord to renew our minds by the transforming power of His Spirit. Let us claim Christ as our turning point, when we are tempted to give up, as we claim our place in Him.

This will take the help of others who are able to show us the love of Christ by their support. May says, "Attachments make us fool ourselves, and it makes us feel like fools in the eyes of others. Yet others' eyes are essential, for our own eyes see only what they want. We might wish it were easier, but being seen by others is part of the desert experience. . . . The journey we take, if it is to be authentic, cannot be a private thing between ourselves and God; God is as much in our companion pilgrims as in our own souls."⁷

⁷ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 172.

Making ourselves open to receive God's unfailing love may best be accomplished through spiritual exercises and disciplines. We can ask friends to pray for us and hold us accountable for at least 30 minutes of silence and solitude a few days a week in addition to daily times of prayer and devotional reading. The Lord may lead us into other disciplines as well. We can share God's leadings with members of our families and encourage them to hold us accountable. We can use the *lectio divina* method of listening deeply, meditating thoughtfully, responding prayerfully and resting completely in the extended times of prayer and Sabbath retreats.

Tony Campolo, in *The God of Intimacy and Action*, gives practical and helpful insights on the practice of listening to God through *lectio divina*, which involves holy reading, reflecting on the reading, and responding by taking a "word" with you.⁸ In addition, Campolo presents a way of deepening our intimacy with God through centering prayer, which includes prayer for protection, coming into God's presence by being still and ending with the Lord's Prayer.⁹

When feeling overwhelmed for any reason, fall on Jesus. When we have nothing left, we still have Christ. We are still in the story of the movement of God's kingdom on earth. As He encouraged Joshua long ago to lead His people, He gives this exhortation now: "The Lord, himself, goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you

⁸ Campolo, Tony and Mary Albert Darling. *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 121. The whole section from pages 116-128 gives a great introduction to an ancient way of seeking God.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 137. There is whole chapter on this type of prayer that can lead us into meaningful times with the Lord.

nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”¹⁰ This passage implies that hope is also something we do.

Hope Is Something I Do

As with other attachments, we must be willing to let go of our fears, frustrations, disappointments, and sorrow. Such feelings can easily give us an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for embracing the life God offers us in Christ. As discussed earlier, it takes our willingness and God’s grace to be set free of any attachment which we are tempted to grasp for any form of self-gratification. The following article comes from a full article written by Pam Ferguson. Pam and her husband Ron were former missionaries, now serving in a church in Winchester, IN.

This past winter has been more difficult than most in Indiana. In addition to record breaking cold and snow and ice, I’ve been weighed under with difficult situations: food pantry struggles, family struggles, Yearly Meeting controversies, and friends I’m trying to support through difficult days. It has been one very long winter and I want to give up, give in, and wallow in hopelessness and despair. It seems easier than digging into my soul to nurture hope and life.

As I teeter on the brink of despair and hopelessness these days, I was reminded (by God’s spirit) of something I heard from Joe Volk, former Executive Secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation. He reminded me that “hope” is not something I can hold in my hand or something I can purchase or own. “Hope” is a verb, it is something I practice, and it is something I do. This lesson became visible to me a few days ago when I ended up with an extra hour and the sun was shining and I decided it was time to begin some seeds in pots.....just in case spring really did arrive in Indiana. The physical act of doing something for a spring I doubt will ever arrive changed my heart and my mind in a way I didn’t anticipate. Digging in the dirt reconnected me with the earth and previous springs, the physical act of practicing hope for another season gave me hope. Today I actually saw seedlings from what I planted a few days ago, and my faith in another spring is born again.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 31:8.

The other thing I've been thinking about lately is one of the more well known star clusters on the sky, the Pleiades ... also known as the Seven Sisters, one of the brightest and closest open clusters of stars. The first time I actually identified the Pleiades was in a field trip for a college science class. It appeared as a bright cloud of light in the night sky and it was difficult to make out the 7 brightest individual stars of the cluster. My professor taught me to shift my gaze from the cluster to a brighter star close to the Pleiades. Refocusing in a different place caused my eyes to see the Pleiades at a different angle and the individual stars became clearer and easier to identify.

I've been thinking I've needed to shift my gaze from the difficult problems I encounter every waking moment of each day and each night. I spend too much time trying to think my way through the myriad of problems confronting my life. I believe clarity will come to my mind and my heart, to my faith community, and to my friends and family when my gaze is refocused on a brighter light: the presence and spirit of Christ, my present teacher.

Shifting my gaze to Christ won't change my problems ... shifting my gaze brings clarity, purpose, and a sense of hope to my life. Shifting my gaze helps me focus on Isaiah's vision of a new heaven and new earth. Shifting my vision does help me *practice* hope.¹¹

Walk Toward the Light

Like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, we look for help and hope, weighed down by a burden that can lead to burnout. He feared that the burden on his back would "sink him lower than the grave."¹² Whenever we look out across a vast plain of despair, hear the words of Evangelist that will always lead us to hope: "Do you see yonder Shining Light?" He said, 'I think I do.' Then said *Evangelist*, 'Keep that Light in your eye, and go

¹¹ Ferguson, Pam. *Barclay Press*. March 16, 2009-2011.
<http://www.barclaypress.com/pamferguson.php/2011/03/16/new-life> (accessed August 10, 2011).

¹² Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 15.

up directly thereto.”¹³ Rather than to bail out of ministry with feelings of inadequacy and loss, walk toward the Light we can see to find grace to go on.

The Light you need might be found in the words of Jeremiah. In the midst of chaos and destruction all around him, he was able to find hope in the Lord’s unfailing compassion. In Lamentations chapter 3, Jeremiah describes the awful situation in the city of Jerusalem. “Appalling utterances are followed by the very choicest expressions of confidence in the boundless goodness of God. The writer seems to leap in a moment out of the deepest, darkest pit of misery into the radiance of more than summer sunlight.”¹⁴ May Jeremiah’s source of hope and confidence in deep sorrow be ours with God’s unfailing love being deeper still. With the unending daily challenges that take away our peace, strength, and hope, we have hope in God’s infinite love and mercy.

My soul has been rejected from peace;
I have forgotten happiness.
So I say, “My strength has perished,
And *so has* my hope from the LORD.”

Remember my affliction and my wandering,
the wormwood and bitterness.
Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.
This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
The LORD’S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Adeney, Walter F. *The Expositor’s Bible - The Song of Solomon and the Lamentations of Jeremiah*. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls), 1900.

¹⁵ Jeremiah 3:17-24.

May the promises found here be the Light that leads us to the place where we can release the burden we carry in order that we may experience the Lord's promised hope and rest.

Jesus said, "Come all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."¹⁶ There is an answer for frustrated and disappointed ministers. Our rest is in Christ, finding hope in biblical principles and models that are **R**elational, **E**motional, **S**piritual, and **T**heological. Jesus Christ is the new paradigm for all who have trusted in our own abilities and failed. A new way of life and ministry in Christ is the way to unending hope and the ability to finish strong.

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."¹⁷

A Prayer for Hope

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁸

¹⁶ Matthew 11:28.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:59.

¹⁸ Romans 15:13.

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APPENDIX A

TWO TYPES OF CHURCHES

Scazzero, Peter, and Bird, Warren. *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, 115.

Proud & Defensive	Broken & Vulnerable
1. I am guarded and protective about my imperfections and flaws	1. I am transparent and weak. I disclose myself to appropriate others.
2. I focus on the “positive”, strong, successful parts of myself.	2. I am aware of the weak, needy, limited parts of who I am, and I freely admit failure.
3. I am highly “offendable” and defensive.	3. I am approachable and open to input.
4. I naturally focus first on the flaws, mistakes, and sins of others.	4. I am aware of my own brokenness. I have compassion and am slow to judge others.
5. I give my opinion a lot, even when I am not asked.	5. I am slow to speak and quick to listen.
6. I don’t get close to people.	6. I am open, soft, and curious about others.
7. I keep people from really seeing what is going on inside of me.	7. I delight in showing vulnerability and weakness, that Christ’s power may be seen.
8. I like to control most situations.	8. I can let go and give people opportunity to earn my trust.
9. I have to be right in order to feel strong and good.	9. I understand that God’s strength reveals itself in admitting mistakes, weakness, and statements that “I was wrong.”
10. I blame others.	10. I take responsibility for myself and speak mostly in the “I”, not the “you” or “they”.
11. I often hold grudges and rarely ask forgiveness.	11. I don’t hold people in debt to me, and am able to ask others for forgiveness as needed.
12. When I am offended, I write people off.	12. When I am offended, I ask questions to explore what happened.
13. I deny, avoid, or withdraw from painful realities.	13. I honestly look at the truth underneath the surface, even when it hurts.
14. I give answers and explanations to those in pain, hoping to fix or change them.	14. I am present with people in their pain, and comfortable with mystery and with saying, “I don’t know.”
15. I have to prove I am right when wronged.	15. I can let things go.
16. I am demanding.	16. I assert myself respectfully and kindly.
17. I am self-conscious and concerned about how others perceive me.	17. I am more aware of God and others than the impression I am making.
18. I see people as resources to be used for God.	18. I see people as gifts to be loved and enjoyed.

APPENDIX B

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008.

- A.** Before you confront another make sure you have taken responsibility for your anger and resolved it constructively.
- B.** Make use of the “count to ten” rule:
- C.** If assertiveness is appropriate learn to pick the time and place carefully.
- D.** Mirror their physical presence.
- E.** Assume an “open” position.
- F.** Match eye contact.
- G.** Don’t point.
- H.** Your goal should be trying to gain understanding between the two of you, not necessarily agreement.
- I.** Deal with your hurts and frustrations as they arise, one at a time.
- J.** Don’t bring up the past. Stay in the here and now.
- K.** Be direct. Don’t beat around the bush. If you can’t say it in 60 seconds or less, you still are not focused.
- L.** State your hurt objectively. Fight the temptation to distort, debate, or exaggerate.
- M.** Do not generalize. Never use the words “never” or “always”.
These two words are always destructive to conflict resolution.
- N.** Do not analyze and attack the others motives. Avoid that kind of mind reading.
- O.** Do not use “you” statements. Use “I” statements instead.
- P.** Let the other person(s) take responsibility for their reactions to what you are saying. Otherwise, you will end up getting tied in knots and not communicate as well as you would like.
- Q.** Ask the other person to try not to interrupt until you have finished. Then let them respond. Listen very carefully to what they are saying. Make sure they have heard you correctly.
- R.** Listen, receive, and accept any explanation or apology that may be offered.
- S.** Do not get into an argument. Simply assert.

T. Name calling is out.

U. Don't order or scold.

V. Avoid "why" statements.

W. Avoid presenting solutions to a problem. After you are sure you have communicated your concern and have listened carefully to the other person's response, attaining mutual understanding, simply ask, "What do you think we can do differently to improve upon things the next time?" Brainstorm solutions together until you have come up with a solution that you can both agree upon. If reconciliation is not possible, then feel good about the fact that you have done all you can do and have done so in the most constructive manner you know how.

X. Your goal should be to facilitate clear communication about the nature of your problem and what caused it. If possible you want to establish a relationship that can be built upon. This is true whether you are dealing with a neighbor, a waiter, a friend, your wife, your children, a government official, etc.

Y. Remember, assertiveness is not in conflict with love. Assertiveness done skillfully will build strong, healthy relationships. In fact, without it healthy relationships are impossible.

APPENDIX C

INTERPERSONAL AND INTRAPERSONAL TRUISMS IN CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 23, 2008.

- A. You are responsible for everything you do, think, feel, and want.
- B. You are responsible for the initiation and consequences of all your thoughts, feelings and actions.
- C. You do not have to offer excuses in order to justify your behavior.
- D. You are not responsible for how others think, feel, or act. They are responsible for themselves.
- E. You have the right to change your mind.
- F. You have the right to make mistakes.
- G. You have the right to be wrong.
- H. You have the right to say, "I don't know."
- I. When others do good things for you, you do not have to give yourself up to pay them back.
- J. You do not have to give yourself up to be loved by others.
- K. You have the right to be illogical in making decisions.
- L. You have the right to say, "I don't understand."
- M. You have the right to say, "I don't care."

APPENDIX D

CAN OUR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR CAUSE DEPRESSION?

Hart, Archibald D. *Dark Clouds, Silver Linings: Depression can be a healing emotion when you learn how to cooperate with it.* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family: On line edition), 1993, 32-33.

Very definitely. For example, examine the following list, and see how many of these issues have caused you depression in your past:

- *Discontentment*: a tendency to envy others and be dissatisfied with what you haven't got or to resent what you have got.
- *A faulty set of values*: misjudging what's important in life, and a tendency to focus too much on petty issues.
- *Faulty beliefs*: a tendency to believe everything should go your way or that life should only present you with its blessings.
- *Faulty reactions*: to be overly sensitive about what is said or done to you, or to be immature and not able to put things in proper balance.

In addition, many of life's circumstances can give rise to losses that can cause depression.

These include:

Financial difficulties

We live in a money-dependent, materialistic society. Money is our symbol of value. We work for money, not food or clothing directly.

The more materialistic we are, the more likely we are to experience reactive depressions. The more we value the material things of this life, good as they may be, the more we will experience loss and therefore depression.

With the instability of the world's economy, more and more people have less and less to survive with. That represents significant losses and can be a major cause of depression.

Problems at work

Since we all have to earn our keep, relationships in the workplace become a major source of tension and disruption. We have to learn how to work in increasingly crowded conditions, as well as how to relate to many people we would not normally count as our friends. These problems can be a significant cause of depression.

Problems with family and children

Those closest to us are often the cause of our deepest pain. Parents whose children aren't turning out quite the way they wanted can experience significant losses. And in almost every household, there's conflict over discipline. Sometimes this conflict is between parents, but more often it's between parents and children. This is a serious source of depression.

Problems with habits

Many become addicted to certain behaviors and develop habits that can be a source of depression. Addictions such as smoking, alcohol, and drugs can cause serious biological disturbances, and they can be the source of other trouble as well, including family discord and marital breakup. People who get hooked on thrilling or exciting behaviors have their letdowns eventually. Even workaholics can find themselves prone to depression.

Low self-esteem

For many, low self-esteem is both the source of depression and a symptom of it. As I said before, low self-esteem can cause you to become depressed, but it can also be the consequence of your depression.

Growing old

For many of us, growing old will be a traumatic experience. When we're young, we hardly ever think about death and dying. But as we get to the middle and then into the final stages of life, the realization that we have only a limited life span becomes very real. It's at these times that both men and women start to think about what they haven't achieved or what is still left to be done. That can be the source of significant depression.

Loneliness and boredom

We have increasingly become a lonely society. The more we're crowded together in our cities, the more likely we are to be isolated in our little cubicles, cut off from other people. I know many large churches where people feel lonely and isolated despite being surrounded by so many other worshipers.

Loneliness and boredom, therefore, can be serious causes of depression. If you don't have a clear sense of God's purpose in your life to help overcome such depression, or if you don't have a clear sense of how God is working to make you the sort of person He wants you to be, loneliness and boredom can be overwhelming.

On this last point, many studies have shown that the sharp rise in the incidence of depression since World War II is largely the result of our society's loss of hope and faith, along with a decline in commitment to religion, the family, the nation, and the community. As modern society abandons traditional values we have held dear as Christians, we can expect a further increase in depression. The modern person is confused, lonely, abandoned, and despairing. Those are all significant causes for depression.

Unconnectedness

People without connections to family, church, and meaningful existence will struggle to find purpose in their lives and will experience more depression. One necessary condition for meaning is to be attached to something larger than yourself. People who don't take their relationship with God seriously lack the chief resource for coping with life's problems and losses. People who aren't connected to a family or find no meaning in their lives will be at even greater risk for depression.

This means, then, that as Christians we have a unique resource for helping people cope with depression. We also have a great missionary and evangelistic opportunity right where we live.

How Does Disappointment With Personal Performance Relate To Depression?

In our culture, where we prize success and performance so much anything that smacks of failure is a blow to our self-esteem and is going to lead to depression. Failure represents a deep sense of personal loss, more so than the loss of material things. It's probably the largest single cause of loss leading to depression, and it's also the basis for the deepest forms of reactive depressions.