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Winsome Wounds: A New Perception of Pastoral Suffering

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

WINSOME WOUNDS:
A NEW PERCEPTION OF PASTORAL SUFFERING

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

—Proverbs 17:22 NIV

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PREFACE

My husband and I became a seminary statistic. Five years after starting work as church planters we burned out, left the ministry and the church. We did not know we were suffering from depression. Every morning I would think to myself, *I'll probably die in a car accident today*. Since I thought every day would be my last, I kept my house tidy and never fell behind on my thank you notes (I wanted to leave things in order). One early autumn day as I planted daffodil bulbs I remember being struck by this thought, *If I really believed I would die today, I wouldn't be planting these bulbs. Either I'm lying to myself, or I have hope of seeing spring*. I never told my husband what I was thinking, but I knew things were even worse for him when he could no longer get out of bed. The moment our commitment was fulfilled, we packed up and left.

We entered ministry full of pride at our accomplishment of completing the 96-hour Master of Divinity degree. We enjoyed our time in seminary and learned valuable hard skills; however, we were unprepared for the existential challenges of ministry. The seminary professors who had worked outside academia tried to warn us about the difficulties that awaited us, but as with most young adults, we were sure we would be the exception. Our experience with burnout was the worst, but what it did for us was the best, because it helped shape us into the people we are today.

Jesus said in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). We should expect it. Healers get hurt and ministers get wounded. Eventually, everyone suffers. Leaders can get stabbed in the back, or worse, they get crucified. Shepherds learn that sheep bite. The disconnect between expectations and reality are common (of pastors toward ministry and laity toward pastors), as are the wounding and suffering that occur in ministry.

About five years after dropping out of ministry, my husband and I returned to church. The Lord brought us healing. Eventually, I went to work on a church staff, but this time I worked alongside several experienced pastors who all had their own wounds. In the years since, I have come to appreciate that in addition to the hard skills we learned in seminary—like how to exegete scripture—we also needed to develop soft skills, like how to “exegete” people. Pastors need additional tools and skills to thrive in a church environment.

As I talked to pastors about my project, the response was universal understanding: Everyone had a story. I want pastors who are suffering to know they are not alone, that their experience can add value to their ministry, and there is life on the other side.

Twenty years after dropping out, I have a different perception. My experience helped me grow spiritually and gave me a deeper and more authentic way of relating to others. The goal of this project is to give pastors a new perception of suffering too. When we look at ministry (and life) as both tragedy and comedy (not just one or the other), we learn to laugh at its incongruities. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “Every man is important if he loses his life; and every man is funny if he loses his hat and has to run after it.”¹

Although I am not a pastor, I have affection for those who are. I hope this dissertation will be helpful, but also enjoyable. If I can help make some pastors’ suffering more sufferable, then it will help my own wounds to be redeemed.

Stephanie Hurd
August 10, 2020
Tulsa, Oklahoma

¹ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 46.

ABSTRACT

Pastors may view their divine calling as quid pro quo assurance against personal suffering. Yet everyone suffers. Seminaries train pastors in the technical skills required for ministry, but hermeneutics and homiletics do not help a pastor who is wounded. Churchcraft is about thriving as a leader in a church environment and acquiring the navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills to do so.

Section 1 establishes the problem: Misperceptions about typical pastoral suffering, the disorientation it causes, and the lack of tools needed to respond in a productive way. Section 2 presents possible responses such as Stoicism, Legalism, Epicureanism, increasing one's faith, and adapting through resiliency. But what ministers really need is a new perception of their suffering and tools to work through it. Therefore, Section 3 introduces the art of Churchcraft. When pastors possess the tools to work through their ministry wounds, it can help them grow spiritually and use their experience to compassionately guide others. A better perception is that suffering finds meaning when it helps pastors help others—ultimately giving a pastor's wounds a winsome effect.

The metanarrative of scripture is presented as comedy and a case study from Matthew 15 demonstrates Jesus' perceptive genius in dealing with the daily challenges of ministry. A literary and theological perspective substantiate these tools: A theology of suffering; personal agency; self-differentiation, and a comic spirit.

Section 4 presents an application of the research. Navigational tools may be taught from mentor to apprentice. The artifact, a book, attempts to play the role of mentor using stories and experiences to translate written words into so-called elbow knowledge. The book serves as the basis for development of a Churchcraft Apprenticeship and Advance

(retreat), in which seasoned pastors act as mentors to younger pastors. Section 5 suggests further research opportunities related to Churchcraft.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

I told you I was sick.

—B.P. “Pearl” Roberts (epitaph on his tombstone)

Few jobs demand a calling from God as a prerequisite. That calling can imbue a pastor with high expectations of success and effectiveness. When pastors experience personal suffering, which inevitably occurs in the day-to-day challenges of ministry, it can be disorienting. Pastoral suffering is doubly troubling because of their role. Pastors know they will be leaders, but not many realize they are entering a helping profession—one in which the lines between professional and personal relationships are blurred. Pastors are in the people business. To thrive in a church environment, they need a myriad of navigational tools—most of which are not the focus of seminary training. Adding another layer of complication, the expectations that congregants place on their pastors is unrealistically high and tends to be unbending. This Facebook post by Dr. Leonard Sweet, and the way it resonated with numerous pastors who responded so quickly, reveals the hidden pain that wounded healers experience:

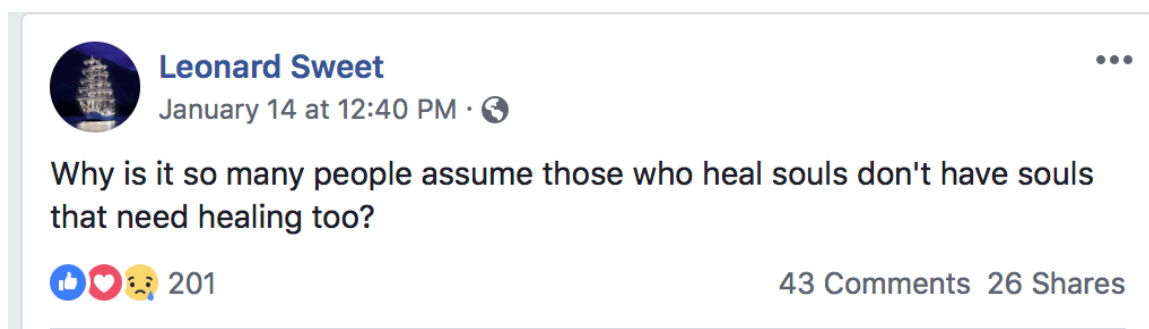


Figure 1. Facebook post by Dr. Leonard Sweet on January 14, 2019.

The disconnect between expectations and reality creates difficulty for pastors to embrace the redeeming effects of personal suffering, for both themselves and others. This incongruity reflects a pastor's misperception of ministry and his limited preparation for ministry.

Most Christian universities and seminaries succeed in teaching students sound theological doctrine and the hard skills required to answer a call to ministry. However, many pastors are woefully unprepared for how difficult ministry can be. Surveys among pastors show:

- 57 percent feel fulfilled yet discouraged, stressed and fatigued.
- 75 percent report a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 80 percent report feeling unqualified or discouraged in their role of pastor at least one or more times in their ministry.²
- 70 percent report they have a lower self-image now than when they first started.

Statistics also indicate the first five years are critical:

- One out of three felt totally burned-out within the first five years.
- 35–40 percent leave the ministry within five years.
- 60–80 percent leave the ministry within ten years.
- 50 percent say they would leave the ministry if they could but they have no other way to make a living.
- One out of every ten pastors will actually retire as a pastor.³

A small percentage of pastors may burn out because they are not well-suited to the pastorate, but the ordination process is designed to identify and redirect these individuals before they enter ministry. Another cause may be they lack close personal

² Pastoral Care Inc., "Statistics in the Ministry," <https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>, accessed November 11, 2020. All statistics in this section are from this website, unless otherwise noted.

³ Into Thy Word, "Statistics on Pastors," <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=36562>, accessed November 11, 2020. Statistics on drop-out rates vary depending on the source.

friendships and adequate support systems (especially true for pastors outside of major denominations):

- 70 percent do not have anyone they would consider a friend and hardly any have close friends.⁴

Many simply have not developed the soft skills necessary to succeed:

- 53 percent report seminary did not adequately prepare them for ministry.
- 90 percent feel they were not trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation.⁵

Another reason pastors struggle relates to perception. The word comes from the Latin, *percipere*, which means “to seize, to understand.” Perception is how sensory information is interpreted. A person’s perception assigns meaning to a given stimulus and is influenced by experiences and beliefs. For example, when a woman approaches a street corner, she uses her senses of sight and sound to determine when she can cross safely. Her perception is that walking into traffic can result in injury or death. Her perception influences her perspective, which is her attitude toward the thing she interprets (in other words, her point of view). Perspective provides the lens through which people see themselves, others, and the world around them. A person’s perception of reality determines her perspective. For example, a pedestrian’s perspective may be that drivers need to pay more attention to their surroundings because they are always distracted (and they are annoying). A driver’s perspective may be that pedestrians need to be extremely careful because they are hard to see (and they are annoying).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Pastors may enter ministry with certain perceptions, or misperceptions, such as: *I will be exempt from suffering because of my calling. I grew up loving my pastor so I will also be loved. My calling fortifies me against failure. Life is tragic, but if a person does everything right or has enough faith, he or she will not suffer—and I tend to do things ‘right’ and have ‘more faith’ than others, so I will not suffer (much).*⁶ When pastors discover their congregants do not always love them, or their calling can cause them more suffering instead of less, or doing things right does not guarantee the absence of pain and suffering—they can become disoriented. These perceptions can lead them to believe: *I am not lovable. I am not called. I do not have enough faith.* A pastor may perceive that because he is suffering he must be a failure.

A better perception is that everyone suffers. And personal suffering possesses the power to increase understanding and compassion, which can strengthen a pastor’s ministry to the hurting. When pastors manage to productively process through their suffering, they become better equipped to “nudge”⁷ others toward healing and spiritual growth. With a new perception and tools to work through their ministry wounds, they can not only survive, but thrive. If they learn to compassionately guide others who are suffering, then their suffering finds purpose and begins to be redeemed. A new perception of suffering combined with certain skills and tools can lead pastors through the liminal state of woundedness in a fruitful way. A new perception—suffering is normal for

⁶ I reached this conclusion about misperceptions toward ministry through personal experience, the experiences of numerous colleagues and field research interviews with over a dozen pastors in varying stages of their careers. My conclusions are supported by the statistics enumerated on pages 2-3.

⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who’s Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 28. Sweet describes evangelism as “nudging” people to pay attention to the work God is already doing in their lives. Nudgers see things others do not see, including the meaning of things. Because nudgers are perceptive, they intuitively find purpose in suffering and see it as an opportunity for growth with potential for redemption. The perception concept is developed in chapter 6.

everyone, including pastors—leads to a new perspective: *Suffering does not make me a failure as a pastor; in fact, it might even make me a better one!* A new perspective toward woundedness helps generate a better outcome.

(Re)signing the Liminal Experience

Adventures are never fun while you're having them.

—C.S. Lewis, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

Wounds disorient people causing them to embark on a liminal journey. *Liminality* signifies a threshold between who a person was before the wound and who she will become on the other side of it. Figuratively, liminality feels like an in-between place, a free fall: the *what happened to me and who am I now?*

Anthropologist Victor Turner famously developed the concept of “liminality” to describe the disorientation or transition that occurs in a rite of passage.⁸ For example, a bar-mitzvah marks the identity change from childhood to adulthood. Similarly, confirmation marks the identity change from a person baptized in infancy to a full member of the church. Liminality indicates a metaphorical death of the old self and birth of the new self. It includes initiations, such as baptisms, and marriages, when two become one. It could include other types of life-changing transitions, like moving, losing a job, or writing a dissertation. People often enter these transitional spaces of disorientation and

⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2008), 94-95. Through his work with the Ndembu people, Turner expanded on the analytical framework established by Arnold van Gennep in 1909.

reorientation without realizing what they are experiencing, especially when there is not a formal ritual to mark it as a rite of passage.

Liminality has application beyond anthropology and already exists as a part of a pastor's everyday usage, although she may not realize it. "Liminal" comes from the Latin word, *limen*, meaning "threshold." The word "pre-liminal," or "preliminary," indicates the state of a person before the status change, and "post-liminal" describes the stage of a person's reintegration back into society but with a new status or identity. Since many such transitions happen without a person's realizing it, we say they occur on a "subliminal" level, meaning the changes are below the threshold of her consciousness. When people pass over a threshold, that in-between or liminal space where transformation takes place, they usually do not recognize it until later. The pre-liminal stage may be characterized as happy and naïve, as most seminary graduates are, and the post-liminal stage as sadder but wiser, as most pastors are years into their ministry. A pastor may experience a major wounding or she could experience numerous, smaller setbacks over many years which have a negative cumulative effect. Either way, the trick is for her to not get stuck in the liminal space or to drop out but to grow through it and turn wounding into strength.

It seems counterintuitive that suffering could lead to something positive. A metaphor for the positive effect of suffering comes from the biosphere experiment: Trees inside the dome grew quickly but were weak. They lacked stressors, mainly wind, which make trees grow strong and allow them to bend without breaking. Jesus provided another natural example of this paradox. Before his crucifixion he said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it

bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24-25 ESV).

Jesus epitomizes the redeeming effect potential to suffering: When he appeared to his disciples in his resurrected and regenerated body, he still bore the marks of his crucifixion. His wounds served as evidence to the disciples that the person before them



Figure 2. Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, ca. 1601-1602, oil on canvas, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas-Caravaggio.jpg. Public domain.

suffered and died on a cross and resurrected in bodily form. He was not a ghost. This is the message the disciples proclaimed to the world. Jesus' resurrected body in fact retained his mortal wounds, thereby demonstrating his identification with humanity and all of creation. His wounds prove his continuing grace, and his ultimate triumph over

suffering, sin, and death.⁹ Most importantly, bearing the marks of the crucifixion on his body after the resurrection testifies that beyond even the worst suffering, life indeed remains.

We see therefore that in nature and in people wounds are formative and linked more to life experiences than to age. The ability to accept and value her wounds is critical to a person's spiritual development, as is evidenced by most (if not all) of the New Testament. When pastors recognize the potential of a liminal journey to help them grow, then liminality can be viewed in a more positive light. Wounds can be winsome—even beautiful, like trees bent in the wind.

A pastor can then resign herself to suffering. The word “resign” often has negative connotations, in that a person resigns herself to an inevitable outcome because she has no other choice in a matter (that is, she accepts it as unavoidable). However, “resign,” can be a winsome word. It comes from the Latin *resignare*, meaning “to sign back,” to resign is to re-assign meaning to an experience. The root word also means to “cancel,” or “unseal.” Re-signing as canceling a previously held belief or unsealing a new one helps a pastor see things differently—giving her a new perception.¹⁰ In *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication*, Crystal Downing combines resigning (accepting God's truth) and re-signing (generating new

⁹ A medieval legend reminiscent of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* tells how the Devil, capable of disguising himself, came to the gates of the Heavenly City bearing the appearance of Jesus and bid entry. Quoting Psalm 24:7, 9 he told them to “lift up your ... gates” that “the King of glory may come in.” Like the scene in which the French soldiers taunt King Arthur from the castle walls, the angels on the ramparts called out, “Show us your hands.” When the Devil raised his hands, which bore no marks, the angels could see he was an imposter and sent him away. It is uncertain whether the angels taunted him a second time.

¹⁰ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 105.

signs that reflect that truth) into (re)signing—which emphasizes the signs Christians use as a reflection of the influence of Christ and culture.¹¹ The classic definition of a sign is one thing that stands for another thing.¹² Signs are systems of verbal and nonverbal communication which derive meaning from their culture or subculture.¹³ Therefore reading signs is about reading the culture, and (re)signing is about influencing culture.¹⁴ Downing explains that since Christians adhere to the unchanging truth of Jesus, their destination has not changed. However, the map that gets Christians to their destination is affected by the culture and its signs. In some Christian subcultures suffering may be construed as pointing to unconfessed sin or a lack of faith. Christians can view suffering as a negative sign or (re)sign it as normative. Likewise, they can view liminality as an unwanted and unholy experience, or they can view it with a new perception—(re)signing it as an opportunity for spiritual growth and improvement.

When a wounded pastor gets stuck in liminality, he can miss the redeeming effects of his suffering. Adding soft skills and navigational tools to the pastor's toolkit can help translate his woundedness from ministry into a source of strength and grace for ministry. A pastor's suffering is made more sufferable when it finds meaning. Jesus is a pastor's role model, not only for the passion and the crucifixion, but also for the way he handled the day-to-day difficulties in his own ministry. Like a sturdy tree, Jesus remained

¹¹ Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communications* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 22.

¹² Ibid., 19.

¹³ For example, drivers in Oklahoma may understand traffic signs in Oklahoma but find traffic signs in Ireland confusing.

¹⁴ Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth*, 18.

flexible and able to bend without breaking. Like a seed, he accepted death as the path to new life.

Jesus perfectly represents the wounded healer archetype: People mocked him as he hung on the cross, saying he could save others but could not save himself. From a modern vantage point, Christians know his suffering was redeemed because it served a greater purpose. The incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the pattern of all creation. A grain dies so it can produce more life. Likewise, suffering brings Christians to an end, a metaphoric death of their false pretenses and expectations. Understanding this pattern gives pastors insight into how they may operate as wounded healer themselves.

Nevertheless, pastors need a lifeline: Paul wrote that the God of all comfort comforts Christ followers in all their troubles so that they can comfort others.¹⁵ A pastor who loses a loved-one or goes through a divorce understands the grieving process first-hand. A pastor who watches a parent borne away by Alzheimer's or who wrestles with a cancer diagnosis learns to speak a new language. A pastor who overcomes depression carries within herself a deeper wisdom. Wounds form pastors. But healed wounds empower them. When pastors can step back enough to see their suffering as a normal and important part of their formation—one which can help make them better pastors—then they can view their woundedness in a new light, making it more acceptable and perhaps even attractive if it helps them better incarnate Christ to others. Few people welcome a wounding experience. But when that experience leads to something better, it can have a winsome effect. Pastors who grow through their liminal experiences—rather than getting

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 1:3-4.

stuck or dropping out—can enter into authentic community with those who are fearful, lost, and lonely to act as compassionate guides.

Pastoral care is the process of guiding people through their life's journey and helping them in their search for meaningful existence.¹⁶ Acknowledging, seeing potential in, and productively processing through transitional seasons allows pastors to (re)sign their disorienting, liminal experience of suffering as a time in which they grow spiritually and become better equipped to offer more meaningful and empathetic pastoral care to their congregants who are hurting.

Depending on the severity, suffering and woundedness can throw people into an existential crisis. Anyone who has experienced guided tours in foreign lands knows that all guides may have credentials but not all guides are equal. A tour guide in France who only speaks Italian is not as much help as one who actually knows the language, and even better, knows how to navigate the land. Pastors may obtain preparation through seminary and credentials through ordination, but that does not make them able to speak the language of suffering. A wounded pastor is able to say to another, *I don't have all the answers, but I have traveled this road. Let me show you the way—or at least, let me walk with you as you go.* But a pastor can only truly learn the way of the wound¹⁷ by experiencing wounding.

¹⁶ S. Philip Nolte and Yolanda Dreyer, "The Paradox of Being a Wounded Healer," *HTS Theologisches Studien/Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (November 2010), 5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i2.861>.

¹⁷ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (Read How You Want ed., San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2011), xxii.

Suffering, Woundedness, and Incongruity

We got no food, we got no job, our pets' heads are falling off!

—Lloyd Christmas, *Dumb and Dumber*

Kyle helped Maria start the modern service at a large church. When Maria left, Kyle reluctantly agreed to lead and preach. Kyle worked at improving his skills. Even though the effort was overwhelming, he rose to the challenge and began to enjoy it. After two years the senior pastor informed Kyle that he would no longer lead and gave him other responsibilities. Kyle received an explanation, but did not understand or agree with the reasoning. The sudden change plunged Kyle into a liminal space. He felt a sense of loss and failure. He was left grieving and confused. In sharing his experience with pastor friends, Kyle realized several had also been wounded in ministry. Neither Kyle nor his friends had entered ministry with a theology of suffering, and their expectations of ministry did not meet their realities. The whole experience disoriented and caused him to question his call to ministry. But one wise colleague suggested Kyle consider the experience as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Kyle was open to that idea but lacked the tools in his pastoral toolkit to help him do that.

This story captures the sense of hurt that can result in the normal course of ministry. A person suffers when he or she must endure distress caused by some kind of loss, whether it be material, physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Loss is anything that leaves an emotional void. Some examples include a loss of health or life, loss of relationship or community, loss of job or position, loss of clarity or understanding, and loss of freedom or a dream. In this scenario, Kyle experienced a loss of community with the congregation he was leading, loss of relationship with the senior pastor who made the

decision, loss of a position which he had grown proud of, loss of understanding about his role, and loss of freedom to lead others in the way had previously enjoyed.

Woundedness can be described as a loss of integrity or wholeness. With woundedness, pastors experience a mental, emotional, or spiritual deficit that affects their ability to function. This “something is missing” woundedness leaves pastors feeling disempowered, as illustrated by Kyle’s story.¹⁸

Wounded pastors may experience a loss of wholeness or loss of heart which



results in a lack of emotional energy in their ministry.¹⁹ While wounded pastors make efforts to progress from seemingly incomplete persons to whole persons, it helps to remember that “holes” can create

space for others. Pastors may not be able to share the exact nature of their hurts while they are having them, but dealing with their own experiences of incongruity and loss

Figure 3. “At a Loss,” holzfigur, photo by Pixabay, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/at-a-loss-consider-holzfigur-patience-262160>. CCO.

¹⁸ The woundedness discussed here is not physical but emotional and spiritual in nature and also mental to the extent that it affects understanding and thinking. This project focuses specifically on typical pastoral woundedness that occurs in ministry. Suffering will not be discussed from a psychoanalytical standpoint but from a theological perspective. This paper presents a theology of suffering; however theodicy, or the problem of evil, is beyond the scope of this research.

¹⁹ Nolte and Dreyer, “The Paradox of Being a Wounded Healer,” 1.

make them more relatable to their congregants. Furthermore, loss to some degree defines the core of being a follower of Jesus. He said, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:25-26 ESV). Gaining by losing is the trademark of a Christian.

Nevertheless, without the perception that loss can in fact be gain, a pastor’s prerequisite calling can add to his sense of disorientation and lack of energy for ministry. On a subliminal level, pastors may believe their calling affords them divine fortification against suffering—even though they adhere to the teachings of the “a man of suffering,” and one “familiar with pain” (Isa. 53:3 NIV). The presumption stems from a conflation of Old and New Testament teachings. In the Old Testament, obedience to the law resulted in blessings, while disobedience resulted in a curse.²⁰ In the New Testament, obedience to Christ’s commands is out of love and a desire for fruitfulness, not earthly rewards. It is not connected to blessings: in fact, the Beatitudes present the opposite perspective. Further, Paul instructs Christians to rejoice in sufferings because of the positive effect on their faith.²¹

Adding to the daily challenges and emotional drain of ministry on pastors is the changing perceptions of their congregants. Traditional biblical values contrast with congregants’ everyday lives. When what a person believes to be true stands at odds with the experiences of daily life, the result is cognitive dissonance or incongruity. For example, students are taught in youth group that premarital sex is bad, but when they

²⁰ Deut. 28.

²¹ John 15; Rom. 5:1-5.

experience it for themselves, they may find it quite enjoyable. The result could be “feelings, thoughts and actions which are out of place and therefore not congruent with what people know.”²² In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen attributes much of the disconnect to a paradigm shift from a modern to a postmodern culture. Basically, he describes the movement from institutional religion to spiritual relativism. Protestant pastors operate from a framework of scripture, tradition, creeds, and doctrines—but their congregations operate increasingly from an anti-institution, anti-authority, individualistic, and experiential spiritual paradigm. This shift changes the landscape of ministry, and pastors now navigate the “relativisation” of scripture and tradition.²³ They confront the cognitive dissonance that objective biblical truth is no longer considered objectively true.

While paradigms may have shifted in the twentieth century and will continue to do so in the twenty-first century, one thing that remains the same is the inevitability of suffering. Yet suffering is relative. Like a gas, suffering fills whatever space it is given, whether great or small.²⁴

²² Nolte and Dreyer, “The Paradox of Being a Wounded Healer,” 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴ Victor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 113. A Holocaust survivor’s commentary on suffering seems reasonably credible.

Suffering in Ministry

What is funny about us is precisely that we take ourselves too seriously.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Kyle's story illustrates a typical scenario which an associate pastor on a church staff may encounter. Associate pastors tend to be shielded more from congregational wounding because their senior pastor absorbs the brunt. Associate pastors are typically wounded through staff relations and organizational decisions over which they have no control. In some ways they are safer, but they may also experience marginalization. Solo pastors tend to get wounded most acutely through congregational relationships and usually struggle in isolation (especially those outside a denomination, where fewer support systems are in place). Senior pastors get struck from many sides—staff, congregation, and potentially also denominational hierarchy structures. In Kyle's story, the senior pastor's decision damaged Kyle's relationship with and trust in him. What Kyle could not perceive was that the lay leaders pressured the senior pastor to make the change. While suffering is a universal experience, the source of pastoral wounding can be particularly so depending on the source.

Regardless of the exact source, all pastors will experience various types of hurtful behaviors such as triangulation, sabotage, competition, criticism, insubordination, verbal barbs, and the emotional reactivity of others' wanting them to conform and to accommodate at various points in their careers. Most who enter the pastorate are not prepared for the rejection and criticism that comes with it.²⁵ The more human beings are

²⁵ In my research, even those who grew up in church tended not to have realistic expectations. I found "preacher's kids" were more aware of and better prepared for the hardships inherent in ministry.

involved and the more relationships that are in play, the more potential for pain. Pastors, like all helping professions, make their living and find their calling in being with and caring for others. As the saying goes, hurting people hurt people. Congregants are wounded and they wound. One experienced pastor has the axiom, “Sheep bite.” Wounded healers inadvertently can become wounding healers if they react out of frustration or ignorance. All people have blind spots, as our metaphor in Section 3 will illustrate.

In learning to cope productively with suffering and woundedness, it helps to understand that others suffer too—maybe not at the same time or in the same way—but everyone suffers eventually. Pastors are not exempt, and may be even more susceptible in our modern context for reasons we will now explore.

How We Got Here

May you have the hindsight to know where you've been, the foresight to know where you are going, and the insight to know when you have gone too far.

—Irish Blessing

Suffering remains the norm throughout human existence and for Christianity since its inception. But suffering, woundedness, and failure fit neither into our “western philosophy of progress, nor into our desire for upward mobility, nor into our religious notions of perfection or holiness.”²⁶ Suffering is less expected, but that does not make it less difficult to experience.

²⁶ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, xix.

Expected Suffering

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the disciples encountered persecution from the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem and suffered for their allegiance to the crucified Messiah. Not only did the early church withstand suffering, they celebrated it, as Acts 5:41-42 records: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (NIV). Stephen became the first martyr around AD 34, followed by James, son of Zebedee, and James, the brother of Jesus.²⁷ Saul, the Pharisee, was infamous for his violent persecution of the church prior to his conversion. The Lord confided in Ananias regarding the soon-to-be apostle, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:16 NIV). Tradition holds that all the apostles except for John were martyred. As Christian Jews separated from orthodox Judaism, scattered abroad, and began converting Gentiles, the source of persecution shifted from the religious leaders to the civil leaders—the Romans. Imperial persecution of Christians and the early church began in AD 64, under Nero. The Roman Empire banned Christianity, and persecution continued off-and-on until the early fourth century. Paradoxically, the more the Romans persecuted Christians, the more the fledgling church flourished. The extraordinary faith and courage of the martyrs created a cult of saints who became revered by Christians and pagans alike. Historian Rodney Stark says the endurance of the martyrs helped prove the legitimacy of Christianity’s supernatural nature.

²⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 64.

Of all the proofs and all of the testimonials, nothing approaches the credibility inherent in martyrdom. How could mere mortals remain defiant after being skinned and covered with salt? How could anyone keep faith while being slowly roasted on a spit? Such performances seemed virtually supernatural in and of themselves. And that was the effect they often had on the observers. Christian viewers could ‘see’ that the hand of God was on the martyrs.... The pagan onlookers knew full well that they would not endure such tribulations for their religion.²⁸

Of course, there were exceptions, and some Christians did find ways to escape persecution. But they valued a glorious and holy death over a fleeting life. “Thus,” Stark concludes, “were the Roman authorities overmatched.”²⁹ After the Romans, Christians were persecuted by Muslims for several hundred years and eventually by each other as sects began to have conflict—yet Christianity grew and spread. The early church accepted with patient endurance not only the personal crises that affected all people (universal suffering) but also the particular losses (voluntary suffering) that affected believers.³⁰

Voluntary Suffering

Christian monasticism emerged in late antiquity with the goal of creating an otherworldly environment with certain circumstances and practices that would produce ideal humans who lived a transcendent existence.³¹ “To modern observers, the asceticism

²⁸ Ibid., 151.

²⁹ Ibid., 152.

³⁰ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 28-29.

³¹ Daniel F. Caner, “Not of This World: The Invention of Monasticism” in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, edited by Philip Rousseau (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 588.
[http://almuslih.org/Library/Rousseau,%20P%20\(cd\)%20-%20A%20Companion%20to%20Late%20Antiquity.pdf#page=610](http://almuslih.org/Library/Rousseau,%20P%20(cd)%20-%20A%20Companion%20to%20Late%20Antiquity.pdf#page=610).

and other-worldly concerns attributed to late antique monks have often seemed repellent, signaling a wrong turn in Christian history or a strange pathology within the Late Roman Empire itself.”³² Early monasticism was a type of voluntary suffering for the purpose of sanctification. At its core, monasticism provided a means of identifying with Christ in his suffering. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10-11 NIV). Paul’s perceptions set the tone for the monastics.

The medieval Irish provide a good example of voluntary suffering. Saint Patrick, who had suffered as a captured slave in Ireland before returning there as a missionary in the fifth century, transformed the violent, pagan people by teaching them about a loving God who wanted good for them. “Patrick could speak convincingly of these things. He could assure you that all suffering, however dull and desperate, would come to its conclusion and would show itself to have been worthwhile.”³³ According to Thomas Cahill, with the Christian faith came literacy, and the Irish learned to read the glorious martyrologies which had come from the continent. Since Ireland lacked the purification rite of persecution and had no Red Martyrs (those who died violent and bloody deaths), they invented their own forms of martyrdom. Green Martyrs were those who retreated from society to isolated hermitages, “braving all kinds of physical and psychological adversity, and imposing on themselves the most heroic fasts and penances, all for the

³² Ibid., 588.

³³ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 131.

sake of drawing nearer to God.”³⁴ Green Martyrdom gave way to monasticism, and eventually the monastic communities began exporting missionary monks to Europe in what became known as the White Martyrdom—because leaving Ireland was much harder for an Irishman than giving up his life.³⁵

Unexpected Suffering

A modern, pervasive, and sometimes subtle theological view of suffering for Christians throughout the United States and Canada (one which has been exported to Africa, Asia and Latin America) has been influenced by the Word of Faith Movement, a.k.a. the prosperity gospel. The Faith Movement was born from a marriage of nineteenth-century New Thought metaphysics³⁶ and post-World War II revivalism.³⁷ Initially, it was a response to questions about endurance, overcoming pain with prayer, and how to provide for family. “Christianity, infused with mind-power, allowed sufferers greater access to God. Divine principles granted every person admission to God’s tender mercies.”³⁸ Over time it developed into today’s movement, which responds to suffering

³⁴ Ibid., 151.

³⁵ Ibid., 183. If you are Irish, you understand why.

³⁶ According to Wikipedia, “The contemporary New Thought movement is a loosely allied group of religious denominations, authors, philosophers, and individuals who share a set of beliefs concerning metaphysics, positive thinking, the law of attraction, healing, life force, creative visualization, and personal power.” Metaphysics (a branch of philosophy) examines the nature of reality and the relationships between mind and matter and between potential and actuality. In *Blessed*, Kate Bowler notes, “In 2007, Rhonda Byrne’s breakaway hit, *The Secret*, became the latest New Thought-inspired articulation of the idealized self-made American” (229).

³⁷ Hank Hanegraaff, “What’s Wrong with the Faith Movement (Part One): E. W. Kenyon and the Twelve Apostles of Another Gospel,” Christian Research Institute, JAW755-1, <http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAW755-1.pdf>.

³⁸ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40.

by renouncing it and by asserting healing, health and prosperity have been achieved through Jesus already. A believer activates what Kenneth Hagin called the “law of faith,” using the spoken word, to receive it.³⁹ The dominant message is that things can get better. Through cultivated optimism the sick, the poor, and the unfortunate learn to live with their pain—but not to confess it. They believe that through faith health, wealth, and success are their divine recompense.

Prosperity evangelists transformed tent revivals into experiential electronic churches through their innovative television programming which grew into broadcasting empires. During the 1970s, televangelists garnered hundreds of millions of viewers through enterprises such as the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), Praise The Lord (PTL) television network and Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN).⁴⁰ The movement continues to pervade as prosperity megachurches attract millions of members around the world and educate thousands of students through universities and Bible schools.⁴¹ Faith preachers are predominately nondenominational, while a minority maintain ties to their Pentecostal/Holiness, Baptist, or Methodist traditions. Additionally, prosperity messages have echoed through the unlikely sanctuaries of Mennonite, Moravian, and Lutheran churches.⁴² It also has attracted followers among denominations that historically identify with Christ’s suffering, such as Latin Catholic and Black churches. “Many of these

³⁹ Ibid., 45. Kenneth Hagin, credited as the father of the prosperity gospel, drew from Romans 3:27 to explain faith’s potency. Mark 11:23-24 is also associated.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 74-75. CBN set itself apart by pioneering satellite technology and 24-hour programming, further extending its influence.

⁴¹ Ibid., 230.

⁴² Ibid., 236.

churches shun traditional iconography like the crucifix (symbol of suffering), instead presenting images of globes (world triumph) or eagles (soaring victory).⁴³ The United States has been developing, perfecting, spreading, and exporting the prosperity gospel message for decades. Coupled with the capitalist mentality of accessibility to material success and happiness and the general economic prosperity of the United States over that time period, it is a convincing and attractive message that has become ubiquitous.

While the prosperity gospel remains a movement among an unrelated network of churches and certain innovative leaders with a shared theology, a postmodern variant has emerged in recent years, displacing mainline Protestantism. “It may be the new mainstream American religious faith for our culturally post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalist society.”⁴⁴ Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is the prosperity gospel divorced from the institution of the church and its dynamic leaders. With MTD, “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.”⁴⁵ Its premise? Be nice to people, have a good life, and eventually you will go to heaven. Because MTD perpetuates a version of biblical truth, its adherents are what Kenda Creasy Dean calls “almost Christian” or “Christian-ish.”⁴⁶ A theology of suffering stands opposed to the “American gospel of self-fulfillment and self-actualization” to which the

⁴³ Ibid., 255. As I learned about the characteristics of the prosperity gospel, I was amazed to see how many churches in my town reflect this imagery. I recognized particular language such as “I’m blessed and highly favored,” and “praying for a harvest,” among local Christians was common. I noticed a Marilyn Hickey book, *The Names of God*, on my bookshelf. All stem from the Faith Movement.

⁴⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

church has adapted over the past two hundred years.⁴⁷ MTD creates new challenges for pastors as their congregants become less convinced of the value of suffering.

Summary

Not only do pastors need to help their congregants navigate suffering in a postmodern paradigm, but they may also struggle to work through their own misperceptions of suffering. Pastors are not immune to cultural or widespread theological influences. As we have seen, when they experience suffering themselves it can have a profoundly disorienting effect, perhaps causing them to question their calling or even their faith. To compound matters, many pastors find no forum where they can process their questions, confusion, and woundedness, yet are expected to lead their congregants through it. Challenges like these can cause pastors to enter liminality. Liminality marks a passage from orientation to disorientation. Ultimately, a pastor's goal is reorientation. The first step toward a solution is recognizing that suffering leads to liminality and can be (re)signed as an opportunity for growth. The second step is to find generative ways of responding to personal suffering.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

Looks like I picked the wrong week to quit sniffing glue.

—*Airplane!*

Pastors who thrive as leaders in a church environment are those who have acquired the soft skills, experiential knowledge, and navigational tools to do so. Naturally, the question becomes: What would help pastors become better equipped to grow through their own woundedness so they do not get stuck, drop out, or survive in an impaired state? And how can they use what they learn to compassionately guide others through personal suffering?

The research question is geared toward Protestant and Evangelical pastors of predominately middle-class communities. However, it could have wider application because suffering is widely experienced. Pastors in underserved communities and those with a well-developed theology of suffering may not experience the same amount of incongruity as their fellow pastors leading middle-class congregations, simply because they have come to expect suffering as a way of life among those they serve. Regardless of a pastor's or a congregant's situation, all pastors will have to deal with suffering at some point in their careers.

Typical Suffering, Not Severe Suffering

A story posted in “The Resilient Leader’s Project” tells of a pastor whose experience with suffering was so traumatic that her heart had begun to deteriorate.⁴⁸ She found she could only get through the day by coloring in coloring books. That woman’s story represents many who will experience a severity of suffering that could result in physical, mental, and emotional disorders, such as clinical depression or broken-heart syndrome. Suffering and woundedness serious enough to require professional care—which may include therapy, counseling, and medication—are beyond the scope of this project. This research is aimed toward typical suffering that is experienced during a typical pastorate. This type of suffering causes mental and emotional distress because of its disorienting effect but is common in nature and not the result of abuse, violence, or criminal behavior. While counseling may be beneficial, this project is intended for those who could bear their loss without the help of therapeutic intervention. Therefore, the proposed solutions do not prescribe methodologies, therapies, or treatments.

Personal Agency, Not Victimization

If severe suffering that requires professional care typifies one end of the scale, victimization looms at the other. Some may argue that focusing on a pastor's wounds and suffering promotes a victimhood mentality of self-pity among those who are called to lead. Sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning claim “victimhood culture” has been growing in parts of the United States since Generation Z (those born after 1995)

⁴⁸The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, “Resilient Leaders Project,” accessed February 17, 2019, <https://theseattleschool.edu/programs/resilient-leaders-project/>.

started entering college.⁴⁹ Victimhood culture emphasizes people's emotional comfort, which can be threatened by disagreements, differing viewpoints, and unintended insults. Victimhood culture has three characteristics: First, individuals are overly sensitive to slights, taking offense easily and often. Second, they avoid handling their conflicts directly; they tend to "triangulate" by complaining to a third party. Third, a cultivated image of victimhood leads victims to believe they deserve the assistance of others.⁵⁰

As Generation Z enters the workforce, issues of victimhood mentalities could rise among pastors and staff. However, leading and speaking in a victimhood culture positions pastors as the offenders, rather than the offended.⁵¹ Likely the second characteristic—triangulation and third-party complaints—will prevail. Because of their authority, pastors may be expected to make the church safe for those who feel victimized by differing opinions among the congregation and staff. Often victims feel entitled to their pastor's assistance and call on him to mediate. Possibly, however, the offended person will also deem that assistance insufficient, which will only deepen that person's sense of victimization. The problem climaxes when pastors anxiously adapt and react to the most problematic and immature members of their congregations and staff, ultimately failing to lead. According to rabbi and therapist Edwin Friedman, when leaders focus on

⁴⁹ Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 30.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 210.

⁵¹ According Lukianoff and Haidt, victimhood culture is largely dichotomous: People are categorized as good or evil, victim or oppressor. Individual leaders who take a stand tend to fall into the oppressor category.

empathy over responsibility, they are victimized by victimization.⁵² The proposed solution empowers pastors with freedom to choose a response, giving them agency to transform a victimization story into a growth story.

About the “Isms”

The pervasive influence of the prosperity gospel coupled with the affluence produced by capitalistic systems leaves people, Christians especially, feeling disoriented when they suffer. People tend to ask, *why me, God?* instead of *why not me?* The pertinent question here is not, *why me?* but *what now?* Although some would argue that having to tolerate “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas,” the removal of prayer from schools and the Ten Commandments from the public square constitutes persecution and their “cross to bear,” American Christians by and large do not suffer for the gospel as the early church did or as the persecuted church does today. Yet people do suffer and will continue to suffer. People may respond to suffering by avoidance or minimization, not recognizing the value suffering can bring. The following “isms” represent a conflation of humanistic philosophies with Christian attitudes and behaviors which many within the church regularly practice. For example, pastors may handle their suffering through a grin-and-bear it response (Stoicism), through attempts to avoid it (Legalism), through distraction (Epicureanism) or through some combination of these.

⁵² Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), 27.

Stoicism

Stoicism dictates coping with the reality of suffering by internally steeling oneself against it. The stoic attempts to affect what he can and remain undisturbed by what lies beyond control. Pastors may feel their suffering reflects poorly on their leadership or faith, so they use Stoicism to mask it. They could be embarrassed by their feelings of inadequacy or simply want to maintain a posture of strength as a leader. Depending on age and family of origin, Stoicism may have been modeled by the pastor's parents. Stoicism can help a pastor soldier through tough times, but it approaches suffering with a lack of compassion. A stoic pastor may respond to his and other's wounds with cold authoritarianism and a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality that overlooks the value suffering may contribute to spiritual growth. Stoic pastors tend not to cry or laugh (or have a pulse).

Legalism

Legalism tends to be rigid and rule-bound, lacking the grace and mercy wounded people need most. Legalism can lead pastors to focus on a never-ending search for knowledge, expertise, specialization and attainment of perfection (as it did with most Pharisees). Legalism engages in strict religious behaviors and sin management by dogmatically applying scripture. Legalistic and hyper-religious Christians attempt to live so as to avoid anything that could lead to sin or to suffering. Richard Rohr says, "You cannot avoid sin or mistake anyway (Rom. 5:12), but if you try too fervently, it often creates worse problems. Jesus loves to tell stories...in which one character does his life totally right and is, in fact, wrong; and the other who does it totally wrong ends up God's

beloved!”⁵³ Rohr warns about Christians’ denying the truth that “we grow spiritually much more by doing it wrong than by doing it right.”⁵⁴ Ego-driven attempts to avoid suffering can make matters worse, but the suffering that naturally comes with life “reveals the constant problem that we are to ourselves, and opens up new spaces within us for learning and loving.”⁵⁵ Legalism eschews failure. But failure can be a good teacher.

Epicureanism

Epicureanism, a philosophy advising mental pleasure—especially a mind freed from fear and pain is re-contextualized by busyness and distraction. Pastors would not say, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,”⁵⁶ but they may still embrace the striving and escapism about which Ecclesiastes warns. Epicureanism leads many pastors on a search for personal fulfillment, achievement in ministry, and enjoyment (even things as innocuous as shopping, gaming, binge-watching Netflix, and other types of screen time). Taking the form of busyness and distraction, Epicureanism stands opposed to a ministry of presence—a ministry of with-ness which Henri Nouwen describes as hospitality, or paying attention to the other.⁵⁷ It is common for pastors to busy themselves with the busywork of ministry to avoid the emotional difficulty of being truly present with people who are hurting and who might, in the process, remind pastors of their own woundedness.

⁵³ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, xviii.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xx. The parable of the prodigal son and the faithful son spring to mind.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁶ This phrase is a conflation of Eccles. 8:15; Isa. 22:13; and 1 Cor. 15:32.

⁵⁷ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 65.

Stoicism, Legalism, and Epicureanism all contain the potential to derail a pastor's ministry to the wounded. These "isms" are motivated by fear, and resisting them speaks to the amount of courage it takes to be a wounded healer. But another danger lurks: a wounded healer inadvertently becoming a wounding healer. The "isms" are good examples of what happens when wounded pastors begin spinning their wheels in a liminal space.

Overcoming Suffering With Faith

Ironically, what may contribute to the problem (misperceptions caused by a weak or nonexistent theology of suffering) may also be considered a solution. As discussed earlier, the Faith Movement, which renounces suffering, is characterized by optimism.

The prosperity movement offers a comprehensive approach to the human condition. It sees men and women as creatures fallen, but not broken, and it shares with them a 'gospel,' of good news that will set them free from a multitude of oppressions...The first step in accessing this good news is the belief that things *can* get better. The prosperity gospel's chief allure is simple optimism.⁵⁸

Although the positive outlook and attitude, especially toward God and his promises, may promote a happier life, it also increases cognitive dissonance when congregants or their charismatic leaders suffer without relief or rescue.

Within the Faith Movement, faith is considered a universal causal agent which serves to actualize events and material objects in the real world. To activate this faith power, the assertions must be spoken and heard. The Faith Movement developed a spiritual discipline of verbal confessions and making positive statements connected to

⁵⁸ Bowler, *Blessed*, 232.

God's Word.⁵⁹ For example, a person suffering from a cold virus, instead of saying he *caught a cold*, he might say he is *catching a blessing*. Positive actions usually accompany optimism, which helps bring the spoken word to fulfillment (i.e. education, hard work, and healthful life choices).

Unfortunately, when a person does not receive a promised blessing of healing, health, and prosperity, it is potentially opined that the person is responsible for the hardship because he did not have enough faith to overcome it. Illness, loss, and early death among congregants is met with silence and secret vows not to judge. When the power of positivity proves insufficient and congregants need comfort, they are usually left to suffer in isolation because of the stigma attached to their predicament.⁶⁰ The situation is even more confounding when the pastor is the one who suffers or dies prematurely. The Faith Movement acknowledges suffering but at the same time also renounces it. Such a belief system may help believers not to become victims of their circumstances and even to become more resilient. Unfortunately, those who cannot overcome their suffering by the power of their faith may be left to hide in the shadows of condemnation.

Resiliency

Resilience theory suggests a person's response to trauma is determined by a small but universal set of key factors which contribute to "RQ" (resiliency intelligence quotient). RQ factors include:

⁵⁹ Ibid., 45, 66.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 175-176.

- The ability to ascribe meaning to personal suffering
- The ability to think rationally and self-regulate
- A positive opinion of self
- A desire for effectiveness
- Having close quality relationships
- Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy
- Laughter
- Personal values
- Efficacy

One of the most consistent findings in resilience research is that people who are optimistic and hopeful tend to expect positive outcomes, believe they can attain their goals, and are more likely to grow from their stressful experiences.⁶¹ Basically, resilience is the ability to make the most of a difficult situation. Friedrich Nietzsche was not far off when he said, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.”⁶² Resilience is typically understood as “the ability to recover quickly and easily, to return to one’s original state after an illness, misfortune or shock.”⁶³ This definition may work when a person gets the flu or changes schools, but resilience in ministry is better defined as “adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy or significant ongoing stressors.”⁶⁴ Resilience theory has been studied across multiple disciplines and describes the “positive tone of individual differences in people’s response to stress and adversity, frustration and misfortune.”⁶⁵ In resilience theory, a person may respond to adversity by surviving, which means she

⁶¹ Ledesma, “Conceptual Frameworks and Research Models on Resilience in Leadership,” 3.

⁶² Nietzsche also said, “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how,” and “to live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.”

⁶³ Meg Jay, *Supernormal: The Untold Story of Adversity and Resilience* (New York: Twelve, 2017), 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ Janet Ledesma, “Conceptual Frameworks and Research Models on Resilience in Leadership,” *SAGE Open*, July-September 2014: 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014545464>.

continues to function but in an impaired state; she may recover, which means she returns to the same level of functioning she had before the incident; or she may thrive, which means the experience positively transforms her as a result. To thrive is to adapt and improve in the midst of suffering.⁶⁶

Some may argue that because of their calling and spirituality, pastors should be innately resilient—that is, able to bounce back from their wounds. A healthy spirituality could increase a pastor's RQ and help him be more resilient in the face of suffering, but in this context, resilience is adapting well, not simply bouncing back.

Common tools in the pastor's toolkit, which have been proven effective in building resiliency but have also been written about extensively, include physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual disciplines.⁶⁷ Wounded pastors are encouraged to consider these disciplines but they are not within the purview of this project. For a pastor to thrive in a church environment, indeed she will have to be resilient.⁶⁸ However, resiliency (in and of itself) does not redeem a pastor's wounds or help her find meaning in suffering. In many ways, resiliency contributes to the solution but stops short of being a solution.

Summary

When devoid of purpose suffering becomes difficult to understand and terrible to bear. People may attempt to overcome this disconnect by saying everything happens for a

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁷ My solution will focus on competencies over disciplines.

⁶⁸ My solution will help increase a pastor's RQ in several ways, so this is a win-win.

reason. Even when the reason eludes them, they instinctively want to give suffering some kind of meaning. Pastors are in a unique position to help if they have found purpose in their own suffering and turned it into a source of strength in their ministry to others. The apostle Paul articulates this concept perfectly:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-7 NIV).

Victor Frankl wrote, “Suffering ceases to be suffering when it finds meaning.”⁶⁹

These proposed solutions may help a pastor cope, but they fail to give a pastor’s suffering meaning. When they fail to serve a greater purpose, wounds are not winsome but vexing. To better equip pastors to process through their woundedness and find purpose in it, even turning it into a strength for ministry, we now turn our attention toward a novel and viable solution.

⁶⁹ Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search For Meaning*, 113.

SECTION 3: THESIS

Introduction to Churchcraft

The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, “It is good”; and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

—Isaiah 41:7 (ESV)

The good news is: pastors are called. The bad news is: calling is not enough. Seminaries prepare pastors with technical skills and objective competencies they need for pastoring. But seminary training is not enough either. Thriving in a church environment takes more than hermeneutics and homiletics. Pastors need book smarts, yes, but more importantly, they need street smarts (or church smarts, as it were).

Pastors are prepared with the hard skills necessary for pastoring but enter ministry without the soft skills needed to thrive in a church environment. Hard skills enable pastors to tackle job-specific duties and responsibilities. Hard skills, taught through Christian universities and seminaries, provide ministers with technical or specific knowledge that is measurable as objective competencies. For example, pastors must have skills in biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics in relation to preaching, teaching, and disciple-making.

However, soft skills primarily relate to working well with others. They include a combination of social and emotional intelligence quotients, people skills, communication skills, and positive flexible attitudes (among other things). For example, pastors must learn the nuances of a setting before trying to implement a preconceived model of

pastoral ministry. Soft skills complement hard skills and help pastors navigate the church environment with greater success. Navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills are subjective competencies essential to a pastor's longevity in ministry.

Many tools and skills unique to ministry are typically not part of seminary preparation for ministry. These tools and skills balance the technical abilities pastors learn in seminary by focusing on the more personal and relational aspects of ministry. This is Churchcraft.⁷⁰ Churchcraft comprises the navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills a leader needs to thrive in a church environment. Churchcraft derives from the same concept as “bushcraft” but applies to a church setting.⁷¹

Since pastoring is relational at its core, the most critical skills a pastor needs are not technical but indeed relational in nature. Some pastors have high emotional intelligence quotients and natural aptitudes for relating to people, while others may learn and adapt as they go. The study of Churchcraft is for those who desire more help—especially for pastors on the verge of burning out, pastors who feel the need to change environments every few years so they can keep recycling their limited experience and knowledge (i.e. their bag of tricks), pastors who are committed to their calling but feel beat-up or stuck, and for pastors who want to keep learning, growing, and honing their

⁷⁰ “Church” comes from the Greek word meaning, “called out ones.” “Craft” comes from an Old English word meaning “strength, skill.” Hence, Churchcraft is strengthening called out ones.

⁷¹ The concept of bushcraft comes from the Aboriginal Australians who had skills necessary to survive in the Australian bush. While vacationing in Scotland, my family opted for a bushcraft excursion through a tour company. We were taken to the edge of the woods, where a wild-haired young man named Zeke emerged from the trees. He led us into the wilderness and showed us the crafty ways by which he is able to live in the Highlands with only a few basic supplies. He taught us how to see things in nature that others missed—like edible plants and tools for starting a fire (basically a couple of sticks). He also taught us some skills, like how to make porridge out of tree bark and how to sharpen a knife on a thick, spongy mushroom. Based on his experience, he was able to point out the best places to draw water and find shelter. This pivotal excursion led me to connect the idea of surviving in the wilderness with surviving in a church environment—which can also be kind of wild.

craft. Churchcraft comes through years of experience and relies on tacit knowledge, or intuitive soft skills practiced over time. Difficult to articulate, tacit knowledge is the kind of knowledge that may be passed from generation to generation or from master to apprentice—just as Jesus taught His disciples through day to day modeling. Ideally, a seasoned pastor conveys this knowledge “elbow to elbow” to a younger pastor through example, observation, and feedback as they work alongside one another. Since such skills are vital to a pastor’s survival but mentorships are not always possible, Churchcraft must be transmitted in other ways. The proposed artifact will play the role of mentor by drawing on scripture, research and the wisdom of seasoned pastors, using their stories and experiences to translate written words into elbow knowledge (see Appendix A).

A key aspect of Churchcraft has to do with perception: one that interprets the incongruities of life more objectively and shows pastors how to respond to suffering in a way that gives their wounds a winsome effect. A pastor’s wounds become attractive when they are viewed as normative and as having the potential for redemption. When pastors gain a new perception, they see from a new perspective. To perceive a better way to move forward, we may benefit from looking backward, as it were, to lessons from historical drama.

The Dramatic Forms of Tragedy and Comedy

The world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel.

—Horace Walpole

Suffering has been the subject of drama throughout history. Tragedy and comedy are the chief kinds of drama known from Greek antiquity. Tragedy originated as a story

with dire potential, but through the course of the play the characters reached a compromise and averted disaster. Comedy followed tragedy and celebrated the reconciliation of the adversaries. In time, the Greek tragedians shifted performances toward conflicts with no possible resolution—this impasse mostly due to characters' holding doggedly to their absolute positions. A fatal flaw, usually hubris, led to their demise as viewers watched in agony.⁷² With this development in tragedy, comedy could celebrate no reconciliation. "Thus emerged the comedians, who debunked tragic extremism and its unbending virtues and who proposed comic solutions to tragic impasses."⁷³ The role of the comedy became to redeem the tragedy.

Tragedy is characterized by individual story lines that, although they may begin happy, always include suffering and end in death. In contrast, comedy is characterized by groups of people who endure hardship but still end in happiness and union—often culminating in one or more weddings. Comedy usually begins unhappy or follows a "U" form, starting and ending happy but filled with trials, tribulations, and suffering in the middle. In comedy, catastrophes and misfortunes are not irrevocable, and all will eventually be reconciled.⁷⁴

In tragedy, the hero typifies someone of high estate, a notable person, god-like or a descendent of the gods. In 1548, Robortello noted the value of dramatic tragedy is that

⁷² The hubris of tragic heroes was in contrast to the humility of comic heroes, whether it was learned or inherent.

⁷³ Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 120.

⁷⁴ A. Philip McMahon, "Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 40 (1929) 189, doi:10.2307/310586.

spectators have the satisfaction of seeing mortals, even of the highest status, are not beyond the reach of calamity.⁷⁵ Alternately, in comedy, the hero is often antiheroic.

The point of tragedy is to get the audience to feel what the hero is feeling. The point of comedy is to help the audience emotionally detach themselves so they can see the situation from an objective point of view. Opinions differ as to whether or not a comedy must include humor. From a modern viewpoint, humor is what makes comedy “a comedy;” however, for the purpose of this project the classical definition suffices is (although we concede that all comedy includes some type of humor, even if it is dark).

Tragedy and comedy share four characteristics: a hero, a conflict, suffering and a response.⁷⁶ They both focus on the problematic side of human existence. Primarily, they seek to address the incongruities between the way things are and the way people think they should be. The hero of a tragedy is the embodiment of human greatness, while the hero of a comedy is the embodiment of human limitations.⁷⁷ Tragedy and comedy are two sides of the same coin. Both deal with the same types of problems, but what separates the tragedy from the comedy is how the hero responds—which determines how the story ends.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ McMahon, “Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy,” 161. Francesco Robortello (1516-1567) was an Italian Renaissance humanist whose commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* influenced literary theories on comedy for hundreds of years.

⁷⁶ John Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁸ As seen in William Shakespeare’s plays, which adhered to the ancient construct. His tragedies include: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. Most know they end with dead bodies everywhere. Shakespeare’s comedies include: *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*. The titles allude to their happy outcomes.

The Bible as Comedy

My way of joking is to tell the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world.

—George Bernard Shaw

The Greeks developed the dramatic construct of tragedy and comedy as a way to address the incongruities of the human condition. The Bible, as literature, does the same thing. It shows Christians what is.⁷⁹ However, without some deeper meaning, life can appear to be an existential joke.⁸⁰ The Bible, as the Word of God, seeks to reveal life's meaning. It also gives humans a comic vision with which to navigate the incongruities of life. The Bible is candid in its storytelling, so as to give its readers a clear way forward and the promise of redemption.⁸¹

Consider the characteristics of comedy: Groups of people (less so individuals) endure hardship (though the catastrophes and misfortunes are not irrevocable), ending with reconciliation, happiness, and union (often illustrated by a wedding). According to the criteria, the Bible is a comedy.

The Metanarrative of Scripture

The big story of scripture begins with a garden party and ends with a wedding—but but the second act is a long one. The middle is mostly about people who endure

⁷⁹ Biblical content is often controversial, such as the Messiah's place on a shady family tree that includes the scandalous nature of his mother's quick marriage to Joseph.

⁸⁰ I once knew a dolphin who had an existential crisis. He wondered if his life had porpoise.

⁸¹ The Hebrew writers, with their humorous sensibilities and desire for insight (over and against knowledge), were masters at telling stories with redemptive themes, especially ones in which the underdogs are eventually vindicated and the proud brought down (as in Greek tragedy).

hardship.⁸² Some are cautionary tales while others are comeuppance stories, but as Hebrews 11 reminds readers, Bible characters with a comic vision operated from a bigger perspective. In the midst of tribulations, they could trust God for a better future. Through Jesus, God reconciled sinners in eternal union with him. The biggest catastrophe, “the fall,” was not irrevocable, but only God could redeem it; likewise, he defeated life’s ultimate incongruity—death.⁸³

A second consideration is the communal aspect of the metanarrative.⁸⁴ The Israelites, as a people group, often found themselves pitted against various pagan nations. But more so, as a community, they often pitted themselves against God. The literary construct of the Bible is found in Israel’s story of origin. Abraham’s name means “father of a multitude” for the Lord said, “I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:5 ESV). The promised child of Abraham and Sarah was called Isaac, which means “Laughter.” Sarah prophetically said, “God has given me laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6 CEB). And God renamed Jacob “Israel” because of his feisty tenacity: “... because you struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” (Gen. 32:28 NIV). The names of Israel’s patriarchs hold within them the promise of a community that will face hardship yet maintain a perspective that all will be made right.

⁸² Revelation 19:7-9; 22:17; 22:21 ESV. The metanarrative ends with references to the church as the Bride of Christ and the marriage supper of the Lamb. The last words of the Old Testament are “curse” or “utter destruction.” The last words of the New Testament are “the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.”

⁸³ In relation to tragedy, it is those characters who, in their pride, hold steadfastly to their absolute positions and unbending “virtues” who arrive at tragic impasses (e.g. Pharaoh, Jezebel, Haman and Herod).

⁸⁴ However, the communal nature of God’s story does not mean that individuals are not important to him. Otherwise, the Bible would not contain so many lists of names.

The arrival of the Messiah signifies the climax of the metanarrative. The story of Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection marks the turning point.

The Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection as Comedy

Paradoxes and inconceivable incongruities characterize the kingdom of God story, beginning with an incarnate God, interrupted by a crucified Messiah, and turned upside down by a resurrected body.⁸⁵ The narrative of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection—which is retold during communion and recited in the Apostles' Creed is—at its core, a comedy. Seeing it as comedy is a brilliant perception that has been understood throughout church history but has tragically become lost to many Christians in a modern context.

For example, Christmastide used to be celebrated with wild festivals and carnival rituals such as the Feast of Fools, which embodied the Magnificat: "He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed" (Luke 1:52-53 CEB). In the Feast of Fools a boy was elected mock bishop, high and low officials exchanged places, and ecclesiastical rituals were parodied. These carnival antics kept the clergy from taking themselves too seriously and the rituals from becoming worshipped; it subverted the old order with a revolutionary new one. When God became flesh (*carne*), he was born as a human child to a common people—in true carnival style—a baby was made king.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Charles L. Campbell, "Ministry with a Laugh." *Interpretation* 69, no. 2 (April 2015): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314564828>.

⁸⁶ Campbell, "Ministry with a Laugh," 199.

Paul engaged the upside-down rhetoric demonstrated by the Feast of Fools in his first letter to the Corinthians: “But God chose what the world considers foolish to shame the wise. God chose what the world considers weak to shame the strong. And God chose what the world considers low-class and low-life—what is considered to be nothing—to reduce what is considered to be something to nothing” (1:27-28 CEB).

For the Romans, a culture in which hierarchy and rank were paramount, the crucifixion was a complex political joke. It was a parodic exaltation, in which a lowly slave or criminal who acted “above his rank” was mockingly treated as a king. In carnival fashion the fool was crowned and “worshipped.” The placard which read, “The King of the Jews” was part of the Roman mockery of Jesus. “A common understanding of crucifixion was enthronement, and the connection between the lifting up⁸⁷ of the crucified and the raising up of the king made for a good laugh.”⁸⁸ In light of the parodic exaltation, John 19—in which the soldiers mock Jesus as “King of the Jews”—takes on new meaning. The scourging was an effort to humble the Galilean upstart without executing him. When Pilate showed the bloodied figure to the crowd he said, “Behold the man!” as if to say, *See? He’s not a king. He has learned his lesson. Let’s be done with it.*⁸⁹ The people refused. Pilate reluctantly proceeded with the mock exaltation (execution). When he presented Jesus the second time, he said, “Behold your King!”⁹⁰ and asked, “Shall I crucify your King?” The crowd’s response indicated they were in on the political joke.

⁸⁷ The Greek word, *hypsōō* means to elevate (figuratively or literally)—lift up, exalt.

⁸⁸ Campbell, “Ministry with a Laugh,” 201.

⁸⁹ John 19:5 ESV.

⁹⁰ John 19:14-15 ESV.

For the rank-obsessed Romans, this vulgar parody was a fitting punishment for any conquered person who rebelled or thought too highly of himself.

Jesus' followers, who truly believed in him as king, had to make sense of his humiliating death. Here, the New Testament writers turned the empire's political joke on its head. They chose to take the parodic exaltation of Jesus as literal. Paul proclaimed, "It is a wisdom that none of the present-day rulers have understood, because if they did understand it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory!" (1 Cor. 2:8 CEB). At the heart of Paul's statement is the classic rhetorical trick of the fool and the jester: ironic literalism.⁹¹ Figuratively the Romans made Jesus a king in an attempt to show what he was not; they exalted him in mockery. The apostles made a negation of the negation: Jesus, a king worthy of enthronement, was raised to his rightful place in glory—the cross became his literal throne, the crucifixion his coronation. Herein lies the comic spirit: The inconceivable incongruity of a crucified Messiah and a God who pulls the powerful down, lifts the lowly up, and uses the foolish to shame the wise. "For Christians, crucifixion laughter is the subversive, ironic, paradoxical laughter inherent in *Good Friday*."⁹² It is what Aslan told the children about his death on the stone table, "There is a magic deeper still."⁹³

Another inconceivable incongruity is a resurrected body. History's biggest plot twist turns Jesus' play-within-a-play from a tragedy to a comedy!

⁹¹ Campbell, "Ministry with a Laugh," 202.

⁹² Ibid., 203.

⁹³ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 159.

Jesus spent the first day of his new life playing jokes on people, incognito. When he joined Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, Jesus asked, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” They stopped dead in their tracks, their faces downcast. Cleopas replied, “Are you the *only* visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?” They were probably thinking, *Where has this guy been? In a cave or something?* Deadpan, Jesus replied, “What things?” (Luke 24:17-19 CEB, emphasis added).

Jesus kept popping in and out of locked rooms and scaring the disciples out of their first-century sandals.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the surprise proved almost too much for them: Jesus had to rebuke the disciples for their unbelief.⁹⁵

The crucifixion is dark humor, but the resurrection is a laughing matter. Historically, a ritual known as *Risus Paschalis*, or Easter Laughter, has been observed among many high church traditions. Priests told jokes and stories, and parishioners’ humorous antics incited uproarious laughter that embodied the liberating, life-giving nature of Christ’s victory over death.

In some traditions, the divine comedy of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is a profound theological joke played on the Devil: God came like a wily trickster to lure the Devil into a trap. The vulnerable appearance of the incarnation fooled the Devil and he took the bait. By putting Jesus to death, the Devil was taken captive and then overcome

⁹⁴ If the moment were captured in a meme, it would read, “I’m baaaaaack!”

⁹⁵ In fairness, he did try to warn them.

by the resurrection. This joke resounds with a satisfied laugh as the world's power was made subservient to God's power.⁹⁶

Considering this theological joke in light of the larger narrative of scripture, it is not too surprising that Jesus would help perpetrate an elaborate prank on the Devil. Jesus' forbearer, Jacob—the patriarch for whom the people Israel was named—was the trickiest trickster of them all. Jacob's name literally means, “deceiver.” Although Jesus was without sin, the propensity to play tricks ran in his blood.⁹⁷

The dramatic comedy of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection shows how Jesus' suffering and death was turned on its head through ironic literalism: how he endured the pain, suffering, and humiliation of the cross and how God used it for good. Like Jesus, pastors can endure pain, suffering, and humiliation—and trust God will also work it together for good.⁹⁸ This perspective gives pastors hope that their suffering can prove meaningful—and that their tragedies work together for good.

⁹⁶ Campbell, “Ministry with a Laugh,” 204.

⁹⁷ Jesus a trickster? This is another biblical incongruity that is difficult for Christians to reconcile. However, Jesus tricked his brothers into going to Jerusalem without him in John 7:1-10 and commended the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8. Again, he comes by it honestly. Consider the head-scratcher in 1 Kings 22:19-23.

⁹⁸ Rom. 8:28 ESV. The Greek word *synergeō* is translated “works together,” from which comes the English word, “synergy.” Synergy is two or more things cooperating to produce a combined outcome that is greater than the sum of their separate outcomes. It is encouraging to know God uses synergy in our present sufferings to create a glorious outcome.

In Defense of Comedy

He's a laugher, and laughers are rare.

—Herb Gardner, *A Thousand Clowns*

Christians tend to engage in an on-again, off-again relationship with comedy. Predominately it is off-again. In the third, fourth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries Christian leaders condemned the theater for corrupting public morals. While tragedy maintained a modicum of value for the common good, moralists bitterly attacked and prohibited comedy.

Christians largely rejected comedy because of the seriousness of sin and the humiliation of the cross. But they also conflated laughter and playfulness with paganism and deemed them ill-suited for Christian devotion and piety. According to author and professor Conrad Hyers, the early church father John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407), with his ascetic sensibilities, preached that people should assemble to weep for their sins, not to laugh and play—that was not from God but the Devil.⁹⁹ In contrast, the reformer Martin Luther taunted the Devil with fart jokes.¹⁰⁰

Tragedy and comedy relate closely. Comedy, characterized by the comic vision, provides an alternative to the tragic vision and its consequences.¹⁰¹ Comedy can redeem tragedy because comedic heroes survive by learning to laugh at themselves:

When human beings lose all sense of comic in relation to themselves, their convictions, and their suspicions, tragic collisions are inevitable. Only insofar as

⁹⁹ Hyers, *And God Created Laughter*, 27.

¹⁰⁰ F. Christopher Anderson, “A Brief Systematic Theology of Humor (Or, How to Run an Ad Campaign with No Budget),” *Prism* 22, no. 2 (2008): 19, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰¹ Hyers, *And God Created Laughter*, 113.

we learn to take our ideologies and beliefs less absolutely, our self-images less seriously, do we have a chance of softening tragic extremes and tragic extremism.¹⁰²

To have meaning, humor needs a backdrop of seriousness. Sufferings in life provide a foil. Comedy does promise a happy ending, but its greatest value is that it shows Christians how to live with a lighter sensibility in the midst of difficult circumstances.

The Perceptive Pastor's Toolkit

‘Tis but a scratch.

—The Black Knight, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

Along with a biblical perception suffering, the perceptive pastor understands his wounds can become a source of grace and strength for ministry. Pastors who flourish as leaders in a church environment have acquired the navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills to do so. Arming pastors with a theology of suffering (resetting expectations), empowering them to choose their response (personal agency), teaching them to self-differentiate (doing the responsible thing over the purely empathetic thing), and encouraging them to adopt a comic spirit (learning to laugh at the absurdities of life and ministry) make up the elements of Churchcraft which the artifact will address. Looking at how Jesus used these navigational tools within his environment, his context, gives pastors a new perception of leadership in ministry. Jesus' ability to thrive amid constant stressors demonstrates that flourishing in any environment speaks less about the circumstances and more about the leader.

¹⁰² Ibid., 113.

A Case Study of Matthew 15:1-20

Only if we are secure in our beliefs can we see the comical side of the universe.

—Flannery O'Connor

Christians tend to relate to Jesus in his suffering by leaping directly to the passion—betrayed by a friend, falsely accused and wrongly arrested, given a sham trial, rejected, flogged, mockingly worshipped, ridiculed, publicly humiliated, and crucified. Any amount of suffering Christians experience is more bearable in contrast to what Jesus endured. Yet by reflexively jumping to the worst of his suffering, pastors tend to overlook the day-to-day challenges Jesus encountered as a preacher, teacher, and healer; suffering that actually makes him more relatable to the average person. As with Jesus, many pastors experience the tension of being both accepted (even loved) and rejected (sometimes hated) by those they serve. Along with the overwhelming positives of ministry, they also endure hardship. Most pastors will experience opposition during their careers, even among the best congregations.

The passion can help pastors relate to a major wounding event, but it is also helpful to see how Jesus dealt with more typical challenges which reflect an average pastorate in several ways. Although the church had not yet been born, Jesus modeled the art of Churchcraft.¹⁰³ In Jesus' three years of ministry he had to deal with many of the same types of strains and stressors in ministry that occur today. The commonalities stem from relationships with people. Matthew 15:1-20 examined within its larger context shows how Jesus used the tools of Churchcraft to maintain personal agency (the power to

¹⁰³ Of course, the church was *his* idea.

choose), self-differentiate, and in fact to embody a comic spirit.¹⁰⁴ Thus he dealt with potential woundings. To put it in the vernacular: Haters gonna hate. Jesus knew how to shake it off.¹⁰⁵

The Setting

The key players in Matthew 15 are Jesus, the disciples, the Pharisees, and the crowd. Earlier, Jesus already found himself at odds with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law: they criticized him and his disciples for working on the sabbath. The interaction incited a plot against his life (12:1-14).¹⁰⁶ In another exchange, they accused Jesus of doing the Devil's work (12:22-30). After teaching several parables on the kingdom of God, Jesus returned to his backwater hometown of Nazareth, and managed to offend the townsfolk (13:53-58). Soon after, Jesus received word that his one true partner in ministry—his cousin John—was dead (14:1-12). Jesus, most likely in shock, was not able to sit Shiva, so he sought solitude to grieve and pray. But the crowd pursued. On a hillside beside the lake, Jesus succumbed to compassion and miraculously fed 5,000 men, plus women and children (14:13-21). After caring for the crowd, he hastily shooed the disciples away so he could finally be alone to pray. Early the next morning, as the disciples struggled through a storm on the lake, Jesus walked to them on the water. Those in the boat were amazed. They worshipped Jesus, saying “Truly you are the Son of God”

¹⁰⁴ What goes without being said is the “suffering servant” had a robust theology of suffering.

¹⁰⁵ Suggested soundtrack: “Shake It Off” by Taylor Swift.

¹⁰⁶ All scripture references in the case study are from the Gospel of Matthew ESV, unless otherwise noted.

(14:22-33). Word of the miraculous feeding traveled quickly; Pharisees dispatched from Jerusalem to challenge Jesus once again.

The Story

The case study begins as the Pharisees triangulated with Jesus and his disciples: “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat” (15:2). Additionally, by criticizing the disciples, they in effect criticized Jesus. According to Jewish custom, saying grace follows the ritual handwashing.¹⁰⁷ Handwashing then (unlike today) was not about hygiene, but ritual purity. What is noticeably missing from the feeding of 5,000 story of chapter 14 is any reference to the customary handwashing. In verse 19, Jesus breached this protocol when he gave thanks for the fish and the loaves with unwashed hands. He did so in front of 10-15,000 eyewitnesses. Nevertheless, in 15:3-9 Jesus volleyed: he asked why the Pharisees give preference to the traditions of men over the commandments of God.¹⁰⁸ Even the experts in the law were not keeping the whole law.¹⁰⁹ Jesus called them out in public and then raised the stakes. He turned to the crowd and said, “Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person” (15:10-11). In a flash, Jesus undermined the dietary laws which the

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2008), 242.

¹⁰⁸ The religious leaders had found a loophole in the system which allowed them to keep their wealth under the guise of dedicating it to God instead of using it to care for and honor their parents, which is one of the big ten.

¹⁰⁹ Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ: A Significant But Often Unrecognized Aspect of Christ's Teaching* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 117.

Pharisees loved to love and chastised them for their showy, false, and burdensome dogma.

Now it was the disciples' turn to react and triangulate. They pulled Jesus aside and said, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (15:12). A cultural understanding helps illuminate the story. According to authors E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, Jesus lived in a time and place that often characterized a moral code of honor versus shame. People tended to be externally motivated to bring public honor, not public shame, on themselves, their family, their employer, and so forth. In first century Judea, honor was considered a limited good, and public debates were considered contests in which honor was either won or lost. The audience determined the winner. "If you silenced your opponent, you gained honor and they lost some."¹¹⁰ In light of the ongoing "honor game" the Pharisees played with Jesus, they wanted him dead—not because he was preaching, teaching, and healing—but because every time they sparred with him, they lost honor.¹¹¹ To regain their honor, the religious leaders needed to publicly disgrace Jesus. (Dying like a criminal would do the trick.) Additionally, in an honor versus shame environment, when a person actually seeks information, he asks questions in private.¹¹²

Jesus responded to the disciples' concern with back-to-back metaphors: "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (15:13). This was a

¹¹⁰ E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blindness to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 129.

¹¹¹ To his contemporaries, Jesus was the Muhammad Ali of the honor game.

¹¹² Peter asked for an explanation to the parable in verse 15. Also, some Pharisees did want to learn; we see this when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night (John 3:1-2).

direct reference to the parable of the weeds (13:24-30) in which Jesus explained that the wheat and the weeds would be allowed to grow together until the time of judgment. Clearly, the Pharisees symbolized the weeds in this scenario—not a compliment. He quickly followed with, “Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (15:14). Notably Jesus dismissed the disciples’ concerns about offending the sensibilities of those only concerned about themselves. He iterated: those who should be guiding others were themselves blind.

Jesus employed irony in his latter metaphor. In his healing ministry, Jesus would ask a blind person if he *wanted* to be healed. He was really asking if the blind person was ready to take on the responsibility and challenges inherent in being healed—that is, of gaining sight. In other words, the blind person could no longer depend on charity but would have to earn a living with no marketable skills. What makes this ironic is that in their culture, blind beggars could not make a living, but they did offer a service to their community. They provided the opportunity for pious people to fulfill their obligation “to God” by giving to the poor. The giver received public praise in return:

The traditional beggar does not say, “Excuse me, Mister, do you have a few coins for a crust of bread?” Instead, he sits in a public place and challenges the passerby with “Give to God!” He is really saying, “My needs are beside the point. I am offering you a golden opportunity to fulfill one of your obligations to God. Furthermore, this is a public place and if you give to me here, you will gain a reputation as an honorable, compassionate, pious person.”¹¹³

When a beggar received money, he would stand up and loudly proclaim the giver to be noble and honorable and then invoke a blessing on him and his family. The crowd probably snickered at Jesus’ reference to the Pharisees playing the role of blind beggars who publicly honored *themselves*. In Matthew 15 Jesus used the blind guide metaphor for

¹¹³ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 173.

the first time, but it fit so well he used it five more times when he roasted the Pharisees in chapter 23. The Pharisees saw themselves like this...



Figure 4. James Tissot (French, 1836-1902). *The Tribute Money (Le denier de César)*, 1886-1894. Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper, Image: 7 5/8 x 10 7/16 in. (19.4 x 26.5 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Purchased by public subscription, 00.159.206. Reprinted with permission.

Jesus portrayed an image of them like this...



Figure 5. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind*, 1568, tempera on canvas, Web Gallery of Art, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_The_Parable_of_the_Blind_Leading_the_Blind_-_WGA3511.jpg. Public domain.

Again, it was not a compliment.

In the next scene, Peter, seeking understanding (not honor), asked Jesus to explain the parable. Jesus used a word that is found only one time in all of scripture. He said, “Are you also *still* without understanding?” (15:16, emphasis added). The Greek word, *akmen*, is equivalent to “even now, even yet” and indicates a strong point. Since the parable seems obvious, perhaps he responded in an exaggerated tone for comedic effect. Jesus followed up with a bit of bathroom humor in verse 17 to drive the message home, essentially saying, food goes in one end and out the other; it does not affect character. Then Jesus illustrated his meaning about what makes a person unclean by providing a list

of vices.¹¹⁴ Jesus' bottom line: Handwashing is external. Food is transient. Of greater concern is the heart.

Back to Setting

When Christians examine the context of scripture, it is important to look at the order in which events appear. "The biblical authors were intentional about the sequence in which they presented events, even if they weren't preoccupied with historical, chronological order. Westerners can focus so much on the time (chronology) that we miss the timing (the meaning of the sequence) in a biblical passage."¹¹⁵ After this exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus and the disciples traveled to Phoenicia, where they encountered a Gentile woman whose daughter was demon possessed (15:21-28). The disciples urged Jesus to send her away. At first Jesus appeared to be rude to the woman, but as the scene played out, the two bantered intelligently. Jesus referenced Gentiles as dogs, which in Jewish culture were only slightly less reviled than pigs. The woman quipped that even dogs get to eat bread crumbs that fall from the master's table. Her come-back pleased the Master.

The next event was the feeding of 4,000, which played out almost exactly as the first miraculous feeding. With unwashed hands, Jesus said grace over the meal and broke the bread. Clearly, he had chosen not to accommodate the Pharisees in their concern over ritual handwashing. As if on cue, the religious leaders returned, but this time rival sects of Pharisees and Sadducees united around a common purpose—shaming Jesus.

¹¹⁴ In that day it was customary to make lists, but they were not intended to be exemplary vices, exhaustive, or ranked in any particular order. Paul was a consummate list maker.

¹¹⁵ Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*, 149.

After the second miraculous feeding, they asked (of all things!) for a sign.¹¹⁶ Jesus indirectly referenced their blindness and inability to lead once again, saying (with perhaps more than a hint of sarcasm), “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (16:1-3). Remembering the disciples’ concern for the Pharisees’ honor, Jesus warned them against the leaven of the Pharisees’ teaching, using a bread metaphor (16:5-12).¹¹⁷ The next event forms the bookend. Jesus privately asked the disciples who the people perceive him to be. They answered with various prophets. And who do the disciples perceive him to be? Peter affirmed their earlier confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus blessed Peter, “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (16:16-17). And then he warned them not to tell. Indeed, the disciples possessed greater spiritual sight than their own “spiritual” leaders.

The Metaphor

A key metaphor for Matthew 15:1-20 is the blind leading the blind. Spiritual understanding—“blindness”—exists in varying degrees. The teachers of the law should have been guiding others in the things of God, but they themselves were blind. Pride, love of honor, and religious show darkened their understanding. Unlike Jesus, they took themselves far too seriously. For the Pharisees to gain sight would require them to learn a

¹¹⁶ It makes me wonder if they forgot to pack a lunch.

¹¹⁷ The disciples’ misunderstanding is comedic in its own right.

new way of functioning. Most of them were not willing to do so.¹¹⁸ When Jesus applied this metaphor to the Pharisees, Jesus directly referenced the parable of the sower: “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (13:13).

However, the crowds who followed Jesus were like the man born blind in John 9. They, too, were born blind “that the works of God might be displayed in their lives” (9:3). For any who would receive it, Jesus offered a healing touch that would radically transform their lives. They were the spiritually blind who needed guidance.¹¹⁹

The disciples were like the blind man from Bethsaida: they saw people “like trees, walking” (Mark 8:24). They were slowly gaining their vision. They were being prepared to guide the early church and pass on the faith but they still had much to learn. Unlike the Pharisees, the disciples’ hearts were open—they had “eyes to see,” and in time they did.¹²⁰

Jesus alone has 20/20 vision and sees all things with perfect clarity. Much of the hardship pastors face in life and in ministry is the result of blindness, either their own or someone else’s. Pastors face opposition, or create it, because they cannot see eye-to-eye or fail to consider a situation in the context of the bigger picture. Fortunately, pastors can look to Jesus for insight on how to handle such challenges.

¹¹⁸ Nicodemus being the notable exception.

¹¹⁹ Recommended soundtrack: “Amazing Grace” by Chris Tomlin

¹²⁰ Just as Nicodemus is the notable exception among the Pharisees, Judas is the exception among the disciples. If he had waited a few days, and not taken his own life, his perception could have radically changed. He would have witnessed the resurrection and (like Peter) had the opportunity for reconciliation.

Application

The Matthew 15 passage contains parallels to the church at Laodicea: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Jesus counseled that church to buy from him, “salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” (Rev. 3:17-18 ESV).

Ultimately, being a pastor is about becoming a “little Christ” because the pastor, more than anyone, seeks to incarnate Jesus in his daily living. Jesus modeled how to “shake off” various everyday challenges that potentially wound a spiritual leader: he demonstrated personal agency, self-differentiation, and comic spirit as powerful tools for Churchcraft.

Today, pastors and preachers are tasked with guiding the church. As church leaders, they are charged with reading the signs of the times and knowing what to do. All pastors have limitations: Pastors deal with the stressors of a relational vocation. But a perceptive pastor humbly and diligently seeks understanding because he does not want to blindly lead others into a ditch ...



Figure 6. Meme: *Don't Be That Guy*.

Like the two disciples in Emmaus whose eyes were opened at the breaking of the bread, pastors have the opportunity for their eyes to be opened too. Continuing in Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

Jesus won’t require us to wash our hands first, but in our current context, we probably should.

Tool #1: A Theology of Suffering

Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who tells you different is selling something.

—William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*

Visited by the greatest misfortunes, Job cursed his existence: “Perish the day I was born ...” he cried (Job 3:1 CEB). But since he *was* born, he thought the next best thing would have been to die at birth: “Why didn’t I die at birth,” Job asked, “come forth from the womb and die?” (Job 3:11 CEB). Instead, he lived to loathe his miserable life (Job 10:1 CEB). The author of Ecclesiastes, who studied the meaning of life, had this to say:

I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no one to comfort them. Their oppressors wield power—but they have no one to comfort them. So I declare that the dead, who have already died, are more fortunate than the living, who are still alive. But happier than both are those who have never existed.¹²¹

Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno observed that Jesus and the Jewish prophets had a theology of suffering and understood the incongruities and contradictions inherent in life, a position a segment of Western Christians eschew.¹²²

On one level, this is understandable: Regardless of faith or popular opinion, life on earth has improved. The number of people living in extreme poverty dropped by half over the last two decades. Today, over 90 percent of the world’s population can access clean water. Food and education are more available, life expectancy is up, and child mortality rates are down. At the same time, in the United States “deaths of despair”—that

¹²¹ Eccles. 4:1-3 CEB.

¹²² Miguel De Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life* (Columbia, SC: Beloved Publishing, 2018).

is deaths self-inflicted through suicide, drug overdose, and alcohol abuse are on the rise. These deaths are often the result of social disconnection.¹²³ Unamuno wrote, “It is not enough to cure the plague: we must learn to weep for it. Yes, we must learn to weep! Perhaps that is the supreme wisdom There is something which, for lack of a better name, we will call the tragic sense of life, which carries with it a whole conception of life itself”¹²⁴

The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus enacts the pattern of all creation.¹²⁵ The natural world fluctuates constantly in a state of upheaval and renewal. Richard Rohr calls the tragic sense of life with all its failures, sins, loss, and death, “ultimate and humiliating realism.”¹²⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr says, “Suffering occurs when we are threatened by the presence in our existence of that which is not under our control, that which operates under a law other than our own.”¹²⁷ With voluntary suffering, a person retains some control. But ordinary, involuntary suffering disrupts and disorients because it lies beyond a person’s control. Apparently random, suffering just happens—and it happens to everyone eventually. Pastors balance the precarious position of being soul healers who themselves need of healing.

¹²³ Andrew McAfee, *More From Less* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019), 179-198. Recommended viewing: *The Social Dilemma*. A 2020 docudrama by Jeff Orlowski reveals how social media platforms have been designed to exploit the brain’s need for interpersonal connection and explores its ill effects on mental health.

¹²⁴ Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life* (Columbia, SC: Beloved Publishing, 2018), 26.

¹²⁵ We reenact this pattern of life, death and resurrection every day as we lie down, go to sleep, awake, and rise again in the morning.

¹²⁶ Rohr, *Falling Upward*, 61. He borrows the phrase “tragic sense of life” from Miguel De Unamuno.

¹²⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 32.

Henri Nouwen used the term “wounded healer” to describe a pastor who must tend to his own wounds while nevertheless tending to the wounds of others.¹²⁸ Nouwen based his concept of the wounded healer on a Jungian archetype.¹²⁹ While Carl Jung viewed healing as a process of transference and countertransference between patient and analyst, Nouwen’s approach is less about doing and more about being. He says, “... Real martyrdom means a witness that starts with the willingness to cry with those who cry, laugh with those who laugh, and to make one’s own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding.”¹³⁰ In being authentically present with those who suffer, pastors die to themselves and become most like Jesus to others. That is, they incarnate Christ to their congregants. The perceptive pastor recognizes the paradox of his role as wounded healer.

In dealing with this paradox, the first tool of Churchcraft is to accept suffering as a normal part of life. A new perception is that suffering can lead to growth, but not always.¹³¹ For Christians to think they will escape suffering is the penultimate

¹²⁸ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1979), 82.

¹²⁹ C. Jess Groesbeck, “The Archetypal Image of the Wounded Healer,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 20, no. 2 (July 1975): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-5922.1975.00122.x>. Carl Jung draws on the Greek myth of Chiron, a centaur who is skilled in the healing arts. Chiron is the most contradictory of all Greek mythological figures because, although he is godlike, he suffers an incurable wound from which he cannot heal himself. His suffering paradoxically works to his advantage, training him in insights necessary to heal others effectively. The myth of the wounded half-human-half-god who heals others is reflective of the Great Physician prophesied in Isaiah 53. It seems Jesus connected himself to the wounded healer archetype when he said, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’” (Luke 4:23 NIV).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹³¹ Whether or not a pastor is able to grow through a wounding experience depends, in part, on the person having the right tools to process through it.

incongruity; death is the ultimate incongruity. Regardless of whether we flourish or flounder in this life, mortality is 100 percent. No one gets out alive, not even Jesus.

Tool #2: The Power To Choose

For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so ...

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Victor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist. The Holocaust claimed the lives of his pregnant wife, brother, and both parents. From his experiences in four concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Frankl argued that suffering in life is unavoidable. He developed logotherapy, a therapy which seeks to cure the soul by leading a person to find meaning in their suffering and purpose in their lives. One of Frankl's most valuable insights forms an important part of this dissertation: People cannot control all the things that happen to them, but they can control their response. In the midst of personal suffering, pastors retain the freedom to choose their attitude toward it. Choice Theory, developed by William Glasser, claims all behavior is purposeful.¹³² Instead of believing external forces such as circumstances and other people determine their behaviors, (external control psychology) pastors can believe that they are themselves responsible for their choices and the consequences (internal control psychology). The change in perception leads to transformation.

For example, both the apostles Peter and Paul empowered bondservants with this new perception—stating they could act as free people with personal agency by choosing

¹³² William Glasser, *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 3.

to serve their masters wholeheartedly, as they actually serve the Lord and not man. As further encouragement, Peter wrote that to suffer for doing good is a gracious thing in the Lord's eyes and the example of Christ.¹³³

Edwin Friedman observed that although evil exists, most experiences in life are not inherently good nor bad. Even when an event is evil, the way a person responds to the event largely determines their outcome.¹³⁴ Again, it comes down to perception and perspective. Victor Frankl could not control his circumstances in the concentration camps, but changing his thinking enabled him to survive (and help others survive) until the circumstances changed. His life's work, a manuscript on logotherapy which he had hidden in his coat, was lost upon his arrival at the first camp. But he used the experience in the death camps to test his theory not only to resume but to strengthen his life's work upon liberation.¹³⁵ When Jesus warned about the end of the age in Luke 21, he enumerated sources of suffering without philosophizing about the causes. Rather, he assigned them a higher purpose—the opportunity for a testimony: “Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near” (21:28 CEB). E. Stanley Jones writes,

Christianity is the only religion that throws nothing away—including frustration, pain and suffering. Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing may be lost.’ He redeems not only human souls but also the

¹³³ See Eph. 6, 1 Pet. 2 and Col. 3.

¹³⁴ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 214-215.

¹³⁵ The cover of Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, claims more than 12 million copies are in print. As I write this, I also notice Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* boasts on its cover over 9 million sold. Turabian style is the source of much suffering for seminary students and dissertation writers. At least that suffering is not without meaning.

fragments that remain when life goes to pieces under the blows of suffering and sorrow and frustration.¹³⁶

Frankl, Glasser, Friedman and before them, Jesus, John Wesley and E. Stanley Jones attended to actively dealing with life's challenges in the present. Jesus prayed in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering might pass from him, but resigned himself to God's will. His was not a passive acquiescence but a resolve to action. Jesus awoke the disciples with the sharp command, "Rise, let us be going"¹³⁷

From that moment on he assumed command of every situation. He healed the ear of the man who came to arrest him. He pronounced the doom of every kingdom, founded on blood and fear, in the words, 'They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' By the terror of his silence he made Pilate tremble on his throne—the Accused judged the judge and with him his whole empire. He would not accept the tears of the weeping multitude—he told them to weep for themselves and their children. He dispensed paradise to a dying thief on a near-by cross, and commended his murderers to the mercy and forgiveness of God. At the end he cried, 'It is finished'—the will of God had been done—done in spite of the hate of men, yes, through it, and that will was redemptive love.¹³⁸

The ability to adjust our attitude and behavior in response to suffering is not centered on passive surrender (incidentally the approach of other major world religions) or problem-solving (the approach of most psychotherapies). Pastoral suffering and woundedness remain, not as problems to be solved, but liminal spaces to be processed through. In the world of Amazon and Google, instant gratification is the norm not the exception. Christians can grow impatient and look for a quick-fix—one that bypasses the hard and lengthy process of spiritual growth. When considering the tools that help a pastor productively process through suffering, the wise recognize that suffering is a

¹³⁶ E. Stanley Jones, *Christ and Human Suffering* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), 110.

¹³⁷ Mark 14:42 ESV.

¹³⁸ Jones, *Christ and Human Suffering*, 113.

transitional space. A perceptive pastor knows that by (re)signing the liminal journey of suffering as an opportunity for spiritual growth—he chooses an active response over a passive one.

The paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5 had been stuck in a liminal state for most of his life. Jesus posed the primary question, “Do you want to be well?”¹³⁹ The power to choose a response stands opposed to the helplessness of victimization. The second tool aligns with Viktor Frankl’s main assertion in *Man’s Search for Meaning*: People do not choose their suffering, but they can choose how they respond to it. The response is, “Yes. I want to be well.” Becoming well is the liminal journey.

Tool #3: Self-differentiation

Dear Mrs. Crabapple, We will miss you. Love, Herb¹⁴⁰

—Herb Kelleher, Southwest Airlines

Murray Bowen, a pioneer in family systems, noted that every family experiences tension between togetherness and separateness. Members of a family too tightly bound will lack individuality, while members of a family too emotionally distant become too autonomous.¹⁴¹ A mature family system will experience a healthier tension in which

¹³⁹ John 5:6 NRSV, paraphrased. Recommended viewing: Father Mike Schmitz at *Ascension Presents* offers additional insight on this question: <https://youtu.be/Z7uymOmkjKg>.

¹⁴⁰ Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines, modeled self-differentiation. One story often used to illustrate his leadership style goes like this: Customer relations pushed a complaint letter from a problematic customer to his desk with a note that read, “This one’s yours.” Kelleher quickly responded by writing to the customer, “Dear Mrs. Crabapple, We will miss you. Love, Herb.” While this may be an urban legend, it is attributed to Kelleher for a reason.

¹⁴¹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 123.

members have a clear sense of self and can remain relationally connected. Friedman recognized how institutions and businesses function like families. He applied Bowen's Family Systems to many contexts, including churches and synagogues.

Bowen's theory teaches differentiation—tool number three in Churchcraft—as the ability to separate feelings from thoughts. When flooded with emotions, it is difficult to think clearly about a situation. “Differentiation is knowing where one ends and another begins.”¹⁴² Being well-differentiated is a powerful response for pastors for two reasons. First, differentiation is a leadership tool, and pastors are leaders. Such a tool allows them to maintain a calm, non-anxious presence when faced with the emotional reactivity of some in their congregation.¹⁴³ Leaders who are overly empathetic will constantly adapt to the most problematic, anxious members in their “system.” For a leader to lead well, he must choose responsibility over empathy. Differentiation is a lifelong emotional process in which a person strives for self-definition and self-regulation. A well-differentiated leader will be a well-defined leader.¹⁴⁴ Jesus, in the Matthew case study, presents a perfect picture of a well-defined leader. Self-differentiation is not a “place” where a person one day arrives but is a practice with varying degrees of success. According to Bowen and Friedman, the greatest success anyone can achieve is about 70 percent.¹⁴⁵

Second, if the wounded healer can differentiate herself from the person, place, or situation that caused her wound, then she may gain a new perspective that moves her forward in the liminal journey. Friedman would argue that crises which are triggered by a

¹⁴² Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 195.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 68, 195.

leader (a senior or solo pastor) are often the result of the leader doing exactly what she should be doing—which is leading.¹⁴⁶ A perceptive pastor sees differentiation as a way to choose her response and take responsibility. It is inherently anti-victim and anti-blaming.¹⁴⁷ Behaviors of sabotage and triangulation challenge all leaders at some point. A well-differentiated minister who becomes wounded has a better chance of successfully processing through the liminal space rather than getting stuck, leaving the ministry, or operating in an impaired state. Differentiating helps pastors draw boundaries while maintaining warmth toward difficult congregants or staff members. In fact, differentiation does not mean distancing; instead it means defining boundaries and is an emotional process that allows leaders to stay connected to a congregation while staying the course.

Tool #4: A Comic Spirit

We know heaven will be fun because the Creed promises ‘ever-laughing’ life.

—John 3:16 according to F. Christopher Anderson

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some headlines of a satirical Christian publication read: “Joel Osteen Encourages Congregation To Continue Scriptural Distancing,” “Church Members Worshiping at Home Could Get Used to This Mute Feature,” “Roman Authorities Investigating Jesus for Violating Stay-in-Tomb Order.”¹⁴⁸ When things go terribly wrong, we can laugh or we can cry. A comic spirit helps us laugh, and laughing helps us cope.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 197.

¹⁴⁸ Babylon Bee, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://babylonbee.com/news?sort=trending&page=2>.

The comic spirit is one that adopts a sense of humor about the tragic sense of life. A comic spirit is not bound by absolute seriousness. Although seemingly opposed to a theology of suffering, a comic spirit is actually a powerfully redemptive tool. Because laughter is transcendent, it can help pastors rise above their suffering. The tool of a comic spirit gives pastors permission to laugh at the absurdities of ministry. To develop a comic vision, a pastor must emotionally detach from the presenting problem and consider it objectively. Being able to laugh at a situation involves accepting its incongruity. As previously discussed, incongruity is the difference between the way things are and the way a person thinks they should be.¹⁴⁹ Christians come to terms with the frailties of the human condition and the hard realities of life by making the choice to accept them. Comedy provides a way to respond to life's problems. Comedy can also alter perceptions and give perspective.

The Christian perspective of God, the church, and spirituality is overwhelmingly solemn—because sin is serious and the cross is nothing to laugh at (or is it?). The perceptive pastor agrees with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's assessment that "ultimate seriousness is not without a dose of humor."¹⁵⁰ Possessing a comic spirit supplies a critical tool to the perceptive pastor's toolkit and to the art of Churchcraft itself.¹⁵¹ Comedy incorporates all the other tools discussed in this dissertation because it reframes suffering as a matter of

¹⁴⁹ Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion*, 4. Morreall credits theologian Reinhold Niebuhr for this terminology.

¹⁵⁰ Cited in F. Christopher Anderson, "A Brief Systematic Theology of Humor (Or, How to Run an Ad Campaign With No Budget)," *Prism* 22, no. 2 (2008): 6, EBSCOhost. The primary source, *Worte für Jeden Tag*, is in German.

¹⁵¹ Saying a comic spirit is critical is ironic literalism.

fact and responds as a matter of choice.¹⁵² For example, a person with a comic spirit assumes that life is difficult and that suffering can be transcended and redeemed by choosing how to respond. Approaching life with a comic spirit and learning to laugh in the midst of suffering requires the ability to differentiate.¹⁵³

Comedy encourages an emotional disengagement not only from the protagonist's problems, but from our own, and from the problems of the whole human race. We are liberated from ordinary concerns about what is here and now and real and practical, so that we may laugh at our own situations and at the human condition. As emotions like fear, anger, pity, sadness and admiration are tragic paradigms for responding to real-life incongruities, so playfulness and laughter are comic paradigms for responding to real-life incongruities.¹⁵⁴

Since differentiation helps leaders think objectively instead of reacting emotionally, it enables them to maintain a calm, non-anxious presence in the midst of trials. Tragic heroes, for example, do not differentiate; that is, they remain emotionally enmeshed with the situation. In contrast, comic heroes can accept a trying situation for what it is and recognize it as only part of a larger story. Viewing the metanarrative of scripture as comedy helps pastors choose a nuanced approach, seeing themselves likewise as characters in a comedy with the ability to see from a more objective point of view.¹⁵⁵ Pastors' individual stories of trials and tribulations make up part of life certainly—but a

¹⁵² Both qualities which increase a pastor's RQ.

¹⁵³ Robert R. Provine, "Laughing, Tickling, and the Evolution of Speech and Self." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13, no. 6 (2004): 217, www.jstor.org/stable/20182960. Tickling, which is probably the most ancient and reliable stimulus of laughter, is a metaphor for differentiation. Tickling always happens in a social context as a form of affection, usually (hopefully) among family, friends and lovers. Most notably, you cannot tickle yourself. Tickling supplies a novel approach to self because it requires discrimination between self and non-self. Differentiation begins with knowing where we end and another begins.

¹⁵⁴ Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*, 18.

¹⁵⁵ This perspective reminds us "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9). Whatever we may suffer, others have experienced it too.

wise pastor interprets them with a degree of levity. About this Frankl wrote, “It is well known that humor more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.”¹⁵⁶ The fourth tool, a comic spirit keeps in mind that no matter how bad life is, it could always be worse! According to Reinhold Niebuhr, meeting disappointments and frustration with laughter is a high form of wisdom; it yields to the dark reality without much emotion or friction.¹⁵⁷

The Perceptive Genius of Jesus

Jesus perceived life in a way that allowed and indeed expected suffering. He took the challenges of life and ministry in stride. Jesus self-differentiated. The tool proved vital: in the larger section of Matthew, he was called a servant of Beelzebub, dismissed as the son of a carpenter, accused of leading lawbreakers, honored as a prophet, hailed as the Son of David, and worshipped as the Son of God. But he knew who he was and did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.¹⁵⁸ Jesus cared about others, but he also knew where he ended and they began. He thought clearly, objectively, and creatively about each situation in which he found himself. He maintained a calm, non-anxious presence in the midst of trials. The disciples wanted to react emotionally to the Pharisees (Matt. 15:12), but Jesus chose to act responsibly. In a later scene, the

¹⁵⁶ Frankl, *Man’s Search For Meaning*, 43. In dealing with issues related to pastoral suffering, Dr. Tom Harrison says, “If I can laugh at it, it no longer owns me.”

¹⁵⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: Sermons for Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 126.

¹⁵⁸ John 2:24-25, paraphrased.

disciples rejected a Gentile woman for being a Gentile woman (and a pest).¹⁵⁹ But Jesus saw her as a person (one with *chutzpah*). He did not accommodate the dysfunction of those with limited understanding. Teachers of the law enjoyed nothing more than endlessly debating the nuances of the law. They wanted to play the honor game. Jesus played it and won, soundly and repeatedly. It was only in his hometown that he could not gain honor. Because he was self-differentiated, he simply moved on.

Although Jesus rarely gets credit for being funny or for cracking jokes, he actually embraced a comic spirit. Misreading scripture, being under familiar with the cultural context and overfamiliar with the stories can cause Christians to miss Jesus' use of humor. Christians tend to project the solemnity of sin and the cross onto Jesus' life and countenance. Yet Jesus played with metaphors, and he was playful with people. In the case study from Matthew, he used wit, irony, sarcasm, and even a whiff of bathroom humor. As Friedman often said, "Playfulness can get you out of a rut more successfully than seriousness."¹⁶⁰ As a preacher, teacher, and (wounded) healer, Jesus modeled effective leadership in ministry and in the face of adversity. Effective leadership capitalizes on the vital tool of comedy.

¹⁵⁹ Matt. 15:23 ESV.

¹⁶⁰ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, xiii.

CONCLUSION

And remember: The one who laughs last ... didn't catch on.

—Martin B. Copenhaver

Several years after Kyle lost his leadership role in the modern service he gained a new perception: he realized that he had assumed the role of a tragic hero and that his own pride had caused him to hold onto the pain longer than appropriate. He still did not find the situation something to laugh or joke about, but he was able to choose a different response—importantly, to become reconciled with the senior pastor. Kyle eventually detached enough from the event to see it more objectively. His wounding initiated Kyle's journey of self-discovery that led him to a better outcome in his ministry.

When pastors develop a healthy theology of suffering, they will come to expect it as normal. A theology of suffering helps pastors mitigate the incongruities between expectations and reality. Furthermore, when pastors change perspective toward trials and use the tools to work through them, they are more apt to grow through their liminal journey instead of dropping out or getting stuck. Suffering can lead to growth that enables pastors to feel more compassion for the wounded. From that place of compassion, a well-differentiated leader can in turn help guide others through their suffering. Herein lies a practical application for the wounded healer: Having tools to attend to her own wounds while remaining able to attend to the wounds of others, a pastor's suffering finds purpose. Finally, embracing a comic vision means choosing a new perception of the tragic sense of life and lightens the load of the difficulties inherent in ministry.

Paradoxically, many churches have buried laughing Jesus and resurrected crown-of-thorns Jesus when it should be the other way around. Good Friday pastors fill pulpits instead of ebullient Easter-Sunday pastors. Many pastors find the day-to-day challenges and hardships of ministry robbing their joy. By (re)signing their suffering and gaining a new perception, perhaps they can recover that joy as their wounds are healed redemptively.

Tragedy and comedy occupy two sides of the same coin. What separates them is perception. Therefore, the perceptive gift of comedy teaches Christians how to live regardless of their circumstances.

Comic heroes are defined by an ability to cope with life's lows as well as highs, in large part because they have considerable flexibility and are not trapped by an absolute seriousness. They represent a spirit that is determined to introduce playfulness, lightheartedness, and laughter into life as a whole. They therefore exemplify a resiliency of spirit that may be down but never out.¹⁶¹

Although mental rigidity characterizes a tragic vision of life mental flexibility characterizes comic vision.¹⁶² The apostle Paul went from one beating to the next, yet his advice smacked of a comic spirit: "Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation" (1 Thess. 5:16-18 CEB).

Again, Jesus warned his disciples: "In this world you will have trouble."¹⁶³ Sooner or later all people suffer. No matter how much faith Christians possess, all experience the incongruities of loss, illness, and eventually death. Many pastors will experience additional hurts in ministry because ministry consists of people. When pastors become

¹⁶¹ Hyers, *And God Created Laughter*, 35.

¹⁶² Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*, 22.

¹⁶³ John 16:33 NIV.

wounded in ministry, they can succumb, they can survive, or they can thrive.

Churchcraft, the perceptive pastor's toolkit, is intended to help a wounded pastor flourish.

Fortunately, after his promise of trouble in this world, Jesus added, "Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV). Through him Christians have hope for this life and a life to come. When pastors enter into a liminal journey, they have a choice to make: yield to a tragic vision or embrace a comic spirit. Be rigid or flexible. Be closed or open. Responding to life with a comic vision allows pastors to detach from their suffering enough to endure it. A comic vision allows for human frailties and leaves room for failure.

Of course, some suffering feels too painful to laugh at but adopting and maintaining a sense of humor about life can keep pastors from being crushed by it.¹⁶⁴ The Bible takes the incongruities of humanity in stride and forbids us to take ourselves or our faith too seriously.

Ultimately, we all die. We might as well die laughing.

¹⁶⁴ Prov. 17:22 NIV.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The ambition of this project is to provide pastors with resources that help them navigate the church environment with greater success. The artifact has two parts. The first part, a book, focuses on the development of navigational tools needed to flourish in a church environment (see Appendix A). The perceptive pastor's toolkit (the subject of this book) equips pastors to productively process through the suffering and woundedness that are unexpected, yet inherent in ministry. Pastors who practice the skills presented in this artifact are able to better navigate their own woundedness and compassionately guide others through personal suffering. This book differs from other books on leadership, resiliency in ministry, and pastoral care because it approaches a serious subject with a lighter touch. Also, it focuses on competencies over disciplines. The proposed book, *CHURCHCRAFT: An Upbeat Guide To Help Beat-Up Pastors Thrive in a Church Environment*, is the first in the Churchcraft series and establishes the brand. The intended audiences are young pastors new to pastoral ministry, wounded healers, and seminary students.

The book series provides additional opportunity for application. The second part of the artifact is a Churchcraft Apprenticeship and an Advance Experience in which seasoned pastors act as mentors to younger pastors new to congregational ministry and mid-career pastors who have experienced wounding. Mentors will teach and encourage cohorts over a nine-month period, commencing with a four-day Advance Experience and concluding with a thirteen-day guided trip of the Holy Land (see Appendix B). The action plan is as follows:

January of 2021:

- Procure Churchcraft domain names ✓
- Apply for federal “word mark” (trademark) ✓
- Submit trade name report with state of Oklahoma ✓
- Develop a full business plan with help of Asbury’s controller ✓
- Pursue lead with book publisher ✓
- Submit dissertation ✓

February to March of 2021:

- Explore synergistic relationships with Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Asbury Theological Seminary, OK United Methodist Conference, Wesleyan Covenant Association, and Fresh Expressions
- Refine business plan; present to Asbury UMC governance
- Develop application process
- Finish building website (to go live with dissertation publication)

April to May of 2021:

- Explore fundraising options
- Continue drafting manuscript
- Recruit select group for beta cohort
- Graduate

June to August of 2021:

- Complete manuscript for first book
- Prepare for beta cohort’s first Apprenticeship and Advance Experience
- Potentially provide manuscript to beta cohort for feedback

September 2022:

- Launch two cohorts
- Publish first book

September 2023:

- Launch four cohorts

Upon approval Asbury UMC in Tulsa, OK, will host the Churchcraft brand of services (e.g. Apprenticeship and Advance Experience) and provide support through existing functions (especially office space, software and website, IT support, accounting, and communications). Participation fees should cover the program costs and provide salary support to Asbury UMC.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Note: Per my expert advisor's direction, I selected a specific book publisher and used their form. This is the actual proposal form for Wipf and Stock Publishers. Since I am presenting a two-part artifact, I split my efforts evenly between the book proposal (Appendix A) and the Apprenticeship and Advance Experience proposal (Appendix B).

NEW TITLE PROPOSAL

Working Title/Subtitle:

Churchcraft: An Upbeat Guide To Help Beat-up Pastors Thrive in a Church Environment

Editor(s)/Author(s)

1. **Please identify the primary contact if more than one author/editor:** see attached.

2. **Is this an edited volume with multiple contributors?** No

3. ***Type of contributor*** (please identify your **role** and the role of any other contributor in this work as Author, Editor, Translator, etc.):

Name(s): Stephanie Hurd (author) and Dr. Tom Harrison (co-author)

4. **Biographical Note** (employment, degrees, credentials, etc.) or attach a c.v.
See attached.

5. **Previous Books/articles published** (inc. bibliographic details) or attach a c.v.
See attached.

6. **Have you published with us before? *If so, please list your book(s) here:*** N/A

7. **If your manuscript is a work of *fiction* or *poetry* please indicate here with an 'X':**
 ☐ **fiction** ☐ **poetry**

8. Title Description

100 to 300-word summary of the book.

Pastors may view their divine calling as quid pro quo assurance against personal suffering. Yet everyone suffers. Pastors enter ministry with great expectations, but sooner or later become wounded and disoriented. Churchcraft helps pastors respond to the

suffering and woundedness that are unexpected yet inherent in ministry. Churchcraft is not about disciplines; it is about competencies. The navigational tools offered in this book are practical and accessible, and when applied, help pastors productively process through their suffering, turning difficult experiences from ministry into a source of grace and strength for ministry. Pastors who flourish in ministry don't suffer less; they just have the soft skills needed to navigate through it. If you are a pastor who is keeping one eye on the nearest exit, this book can help. It might even give you a reason to smile.

9. Table of Contents

SECTION 1: A NEW PERCEPTION

- **Prologue: 'Twas the Night Before Christmas**
For many pastors Christmas Eve is the biggest night of the year. At one large church everything that can go wrong—does. Depending on a pastor's perception, this story could be interpreted as a comedy or a calamity.
- **Introduction: The Art of Churchcraft**
Seminaries expertly train pastors with the hard skills of technical knowledge required for ministry, but hermeneutics and homiletics do not help a pastor who is wounded. Succeeding as a pastor requires a myriad of soft skills. Churchcraft teaches, thriving as a leader in a church environment, and acquiring the navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills, to do so.
- **Chapter 1: It's All About Perceptions**
Shakespeare wrote, "Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so." Many experiences in ministry leave room for personal interpretation. The way a pastor responds to daily challenges, woundedness and personal suffering will largely determine their outcome. The first tool of Churchcraft shows how to manage perceptions.
- **Chapter 2: You Can Laugh or You Can Cry**
Comedy and tragedy form two sides of the same coin. The art of Churchcraft begins with developing a new perception—one that helps pastors interpret life, ministry, and suffering through the biblical lens of comedy. Looking at the comic elements found in the Bible and in Jesus' narrative will help pastors begin to reframe their own wounding experiences.
- **Chapter 3: The Perceptive Genius of Jesus**
A case study from Matthew 15:1-20 demonstrates how Jesus dealt with daily challenges in his ministry and excelled in the art of Churchcraft.

SECTION 2: THE PERCEPTIVE PASTOR'S TOOLKIT

- **Chapter 4: (Re)Signing Is a Great Option**
Liminality is a transitional space between disorientation and reorientation. Without a map, wounded pastors can get stuck or drop out—never reaching the critical reorientation stage. (Re)signing suffering as an opportunity for growth gives suffering purpose so that pastors can navigate through their disorientation more productively.

- **Chapter 5: You Possess a Superpower That Changes Everything**
Pastors cannot control everything that happens to them, but they can control what they think, say and do. Pastors can choose their response, and that is incredibly powerful. In the midst of personal suffering, pastors retain personal agency. Exercising the power to choose their attitude and their response keeps pastors from feeling helpless or becoming stuck.
- **Chapter 6: Lower Your Expectations—Raise Your Commitment**
Few jobs have a calling from God as a prerequisite. That calling can imbue a pastor with high expectations of success and effectiveness. This simple Churchcraft axiom: “lower your expectations—raise your commitment” helps pastors mitigate the incongruities between expectations and reality.
- **Chapter 7: Beware! Sheep Bite**
Shepherding people can be painful. Self-differentiation is another empowering tool, helps pastors separate thoughts from feelings and learn to respond to the challenges of ministry with a calm, non-anxious presence. Differentiation helps pastors define themselves while staying connected to the people they serve.
- **Chapter 8: Don’t Let Your Joy Factor Slip**
A joyful pastor is less likely to burn out of ministry. A comic spirit approaches serious matters with a lighter touch and allows pastors to laugh at the absurdities of ministry instead of being crushed by them.

SECTION 3: REDEMPTION IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL

- **Chapter 9: Redeeming the Wounds**
Victor Frankl wrote, “Suffering ceases to be suffering when it finds meaning.” When pastors possess the tools and skills to work through their ministry wounds, it can help them grow spiritually and use the experience to become compassionate guides to others. This chapter illustrates how one pastor’s wounds were redeemed.
- **Chapter 10: After You’ve Spent Yourself Crying**
Emotional wounding is a reality for all pastors. Wounded healers who grow through their suffering are better equipped to guide others. Sharing about the experience can be redemptive, but it takes wisdom to do so appropriately. This chapter teaches pastors how to share without regrets.
- **Conclusion: The Transfer of Wisdom**
This book plays the role of mentor by drawing on the wisdom of seasoned pastors—using their stories and experiences to translate the written words into so-called “elbow knowledge.” Churchcraft helps pastors become better pastors so they can thrive in their church environment.
- **Epilogue: And the Award Goes to...**
In response to the opening scenario, the story resumes at the first staff meeting after that fateful Christmas Eve. Laughing at the absurdities of the night illustrates the senior pastor’s choice to respond to the situation as a comedy rather than a calamity.

10. Contributors

If the book is an edited volume please provide some employment information on the contributors: N/A

11. Market

Who are the intended readers? ACADEMIC (scholars, college or seminary students, pastors) or GENERAL READERS?

ACADEMIC

- *Primary audience:* Pastors, specifically those who are feeling beat-up and verging on burnout; pastors who feel the need to change churches every few years so they can keep recycling their limited knowledge (i.e. their bag of tricks); and pastors who want to keep learning, growing, and honing their craft so they can flourish in their church environment.
- *Secondary audience:* Seminary students. The book includes an extensive bibliography and reflection questions.

12. Marketing Ideas (if you have any)

Seminaries are expert in teaching students sound theological doctrine and emphasizing the hard skills required to answer a call to ministry. Yet 53 percent of pastors say they were unprepared for the existential difficulty of ministry, while 90 percent feel they were not trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation. Additionally, 35-40 percent leave the ministry within five years. This book picks up where seminaries leave off—adding strength to strength by affording current and future church leaders the opportunity to be apprenticed by a seasoned pastor in the art of Churchcraft. Co-author Dr. Tom Harrison, senior pastor of one of the largest United Methodist Churches in the U.S., has 40 years of experience and synergistic relationships with Asbury Theological Seminary, Oklahoma Wesleyan University, the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary, Juan Wesley Methodist Seminary, and pastors around the world.

13. Competing titles

How does it compare to similar books already available on the market?

Tod Bolsinger just released a book, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) that addresses many similar themes with a strong focus on adaptive leadership. Pastors who read *Tempered* would probably find *Churchcraft* to be complementary. Both draw from the work of Edwin Freidman and Victor Frankl. In *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015) Peter Scazzero helps pastors assess their leadership health and proposes a set of personal disciplines and soft skills associated with uniquely Christian leadership. Matthew Hansen's *An Undoing: A Pastor's Story of Resilience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019) presents his own story of burnout and his journey back to emotional health. He highlights themes of liminality and resiliency and discusses disciplines which helped restore him to ministry. *Resilient Ministry: What*

Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving by Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman and Donald C. Guthrie (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) presents a comprehensive study among working pastors over a five-year period to determine key practices that promote a sustainable and fruitful ministry.

However, *Churchcraft* draws on research, scripture, stories and 40 years of experience from a pastor who has “been there, done that.” Co-author Dr. Tom Harrison applies a comic spirit to the challenges of ministry—providing pastors with a new perception of the woundedness they experience and tools to navigate through it. The soft skills taught in this book complement the hard skills taught in seminary to help pastors thrive. *Churchcraft* is a guide for becoming a better pastor.

14. Unique Features

If your book is intended for an academic audience, how does it make a new contribution to the current scholarship on this subject?

This book offers an attractive approach to a difficult reality. It applies a comic spirit to the subject of pastoral suffering. When things don’t go as expected, pastors can laugh or cry. A comic spirit helps them laugh and laughing helps them cope.

15. Estimated word count (*not* page extent)

Word Count (Chapters): Average 2,500 each

Word Count with Appendices: N/A

Word Count Notes: Approximately 3,000

Total Word Count: 40,000 to 45,000 (a short and punchy nonfiction)

*****For works of Poetry, please indicate the number of poems in your collection:** N/A

16. Will your book project include tables, charts, graphs, illustrations, or photographs, tables or charts? If so, please indicate here the total number of tables, charts, graphs, illustrations, and images to be used in your book:

Yes, it will include ten to fifteen images.

17. Estimated manuscript delivery date: August 2021

18. Individuals who may be prepared to endorse your book:

The authors have already procured an endorsement from John Wesley who said, “*When I read this book I felt my heart strangely warmed.*” Other potential endorsements: Leonard Sweet, PhD (author, educator, and speaker), Tim Tennent, PhD (president of Asbury Theological Seminary), and Jim Stovall (author and motivational speaker).

19. Note for Dissertations: N/A

20. Other: Sample Chapter / Complete manuscript: See Appendix A

SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

All's well that ends well.

—William Shakespeare

I executed this dissertation through bibliographic research informed by ministry and theological sources. Illustrative and anecdotal evidence collected through interviews with local pastors and laity also informed the research. The bulk of the dissertation evolved through a series of essays written over a two-year period of coursework with the DMin program at Portland Seminary.

The nature of the NPO dictated the chosen mode and methodology of research for the dissertation. The approach was appropriate to the topic, fitting for the DMin program, and within the skill set of the researcher.

A personal reflection of the process: I improved on several hard skills such as interviewing, researching, writing, and editing. I also gained new skills such as navigating the technical aspects of online learning and developing a website. Deepening my understanding of the comic spirit provided the greatest delight in my research. The tools of self-differentiation and the power of personal agency served me well, and I have shared these tools with others along the way. Furthermore, the requirements of producing the artifact encouraged my forward thinking about how best to apply what I have learned. How thrilling to establish the Churchcraft brand and to begin writing books that will translate experience into elbow knowledge. This will require more research into the differences between competencies and disciplines, and further exploration into how competencies can be taught. An effective approach to developing particular soft skills for

ministry also merits further investigation, as does the relationship of personal identity to the role of pastor.

APPENDIX A: WRITING SAMPLE

*Churchcraft: An Upbeat Guide To Help Beat-Up Pastors Thrive
in a Church Environment***Prologue**

‘Twas the Night Before Christmas...

—Clement Clarke Moore

Christmas Eve is the biggest night of the year for most pastors. Among First Church’s five services that begin in the afternoon and end at midnight, approximately 8,000 people will pass through their doors. The staff begins planning these services in July. They are not bent on perfection, but they strive for excellence. One particular December 24, the senior pastor felt confident his staff had done everything possible to prepare; he had a killer multi-media message; the sanctuary looked beautiful; and the mood was festive. People were still shuffling in as the lights dimmed. The first service opened with a video. The wrong video. Back of house texted front of house: “Our mistake. Got it out of the way early. Should be good from here.”

It got worse.

The first service featured a story time for children. During planning the children’s minister confidently told the worship team to expect about twenty kids. She miscalculated. A stream of children began flowing to the front of the sanctuary. The stream turned into a flood and the flood turned into a torrent. In spite of the chaos

churning around him, the senior pastor pulled off the story time. The first service was now behind schedule with only a thirty-minute turn-around between services. During the traditional congregational candle lighting, the angelic singing of “Silent Night” was interrupted by a child crying, “Mimi, your hair’s on fire. Mimi! Your hair’s on fire!” The first service ended twelve minutes late and the sanctuary had a faint, but pungent odor of burnt hair lingering in the air. As the staff and volunteers quickly cleared the room and prepped for the next service, they learned the local television station had arrived wanting to do a live broadcast. After the service started, the pastor noticed the Advent candles were not lit. These were crucial to a later part of the service. The producer texted the band leader (who had *insisted* they not use acolytes and agreed to be responsible for them) and asked, “Who was supposed to light the candles?” On the platform, the band leader looked at the text, made eye contact with the producer and shrugged his shoulders. As the lector stepped up to read the Christmas narrative from Luke, the producer caught the eye of the lead vocalist and motioned to the candles. The lead vocalist subtly stepped toward the candles, which were ensconced in an enormous ring of poinsettias (which the decorating team had *insisted* on having). At a mere five feet in height, she could not reach all the wicks. After several tries, she gave up. A second vocalist stepped over to help. She could not get the lighter to work. A third vocalist came to her assistance. All of this was happening directly behind the reader, squarely in the camera's frame. The three-ring circus was being broadcast throughout the city. The senior pastor groaned.

But his turn was coming.

In every service the sermon follows the offertory, but in this service—their biggest service—the offertory was different. The senior pastor bounded up the steps at

the usual time, ready to preach to a full house. But the music did not stop. As the music director, who was leading the orchestra, turned around to lead the congregation, he found himself eye-to-eye with the pastor, one song into a three-song medley. Miraculously, the pastor recovered; he even made it look intentional. However, after the benediction he closed the service—and the live broadcast—by turning to the assisting pastor and saying on air, “Merry Christmas, Dick.” (This was the assisting pastor’s name, but still.)

As the night progressed, the lector’s microphone pack fell out of his pocket and became disconnected as he stepped up to read. Later, the lector dropped his Bible and lost his place, also as he stepped up to read. The organist fell down the steps and twisted an ankle. Being the only organist, she heroically soldiered on. Moments before the last service began, the computer crashed, launching another flurry of frantic texts between front of house and back of house. The computer rebooted halfway through the service; thus, the night ended the same way it began, with the first video getting missed. In the post-service evaluation, the band leader had only this to say: “Sloppy, sloppy, sloppy.”

Now, put yourself in the shoes of this senior pastor. Would you call this Christmas Eve at First Church a tragedy or a comedy? What would be your response? How would you have handled the situation as a leader?

INTRODUCTION:

THE ART OF CHURCHCRAFT

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

—Psalm 126:5 (ESV)

The good news: Pastors are called. The bad news: Calling is not enough.

Seminaries prepare pastors with technical skills and objective competencies they need for pastoring. But seminary training is not enough either. Thriving in a church environment takes more than hermeneutics and homiletics. Pastors need book smarts, yes, but more importantly, they need street smarts (or church smarts, as it were). The first step to a pastor's success, is simply staying in the game.

Five years after graduating seminary, my husband and I became a seminary statistic. We burned out, left the ministry and the church. Both of us were deeply wounded and suffering from depression. Every morning I would think to myself, *I'll probably die in a car accident today*. Since I thought every day would be my last, I kept my house tidy and never fell behind on my thank you notes (I wanted to leave things in order). One early autumn day while planting flower bulbs this thought struck me, *If I really believed I would die today, I wouldn't be planting these bulbs. Either I'm lying to myself or I still have hope*. I never told my husband what I was thinking but I knew things were even worse for him when he could no longer get out of bed.

We entered ministry prideful of our accomplishment. Completing the 96-hour Master of Divinity degree was no small thing. We enjoyed our time in seminary and learned much about ministry, however, we were ill-prepared for how difficult actual ministry would be. The seminary professors who had worked outside academia tried to

warn us, but as with most young adults, we were sure we were the exception. We arrived at our church-planting assignment as bi-vocational ministers with enthusiasm, excitement, and more than a little swagger. Honestly, we thought we were pretty awesome. In reality, we had no idea what we were doing (but we did not even know enough to know that). Within two years our ministry began a slow burn. Within five years we burned out. And we wanted out. We decided to make our exit the moment our five-year commitment was complete. We watched the clock and waited for the proverbial bell to ring. When it did, we sold our house, left town and never looked back. We had two little kids, no jobs, no place to go and nothing to show for our efforts. Our church plant did not take root. Our first ministry assignment was a failure.

Since that time, I discovered healers get hurt and ministers get wounded. Jesus said in this world we will have trouble. We should expect it. Eventually, everyone suffers—even (especially) pastors. Studies indicate the early years are critical:

- One out of three felt totally burned-out within the first five years.
- 35–40 percent leave the ministry within five years.
- 60–80 percent leave the ministry within ten years.
- 50 percent say they would leave the ministry if they could but they have no other way to make a living.
- Only one out of every ten pastors will actually retire as a pastor.¹⁶⁵

Tom’s dilemma came about thirty-five years into his ministry. He flew through the early years and always served happily, whether shepherding a congregation with eleven people or 3,500 in worship. The churches he pastored enjoyed steady growth and his appointments kept pace with his ambitious contentment. However, when Tom turned 50 (and at the height of his career), he experienced a series of setbacks that began with a

¹⁶⁵ Into Thy Word, “Statistics on Pastors,” <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=36562>, accessed on November 11, 2020. Statistics on drop-out rates vary depending on the source.

diagnosis of prostate cancer and went downhill from there. After a massive building campaign followed by a season of explosive growth, worship attendance leveled out and began showing signs of decline (for the first time in his career). Some staff suggested he was too old to reach younger generations (their generation). Tom bought into the new script that he was losing his effectiveness. In his woundedness and crisis of self-doubt, his leadership began to fold in on itself. The more he withdrew, the more others tried to fill the gaps and the more paralyzed he became. Most people who tried to help were well-intentioned but some were less so. Tom experienced sabotage and triangulation from his trusted advisors, colleagues, and friends. Tom's ministry and his career reached a point of crisis. He had to determine if he would drop out, fade away, or regain control.

Tom decided he would stay and figure it out. However, he did not know where to begin. Then he made a discovery—one that gave him a new perception of what he was experiencing. He recognized himself in what rabbi and therapist Edwin Friedman called a “failure of nerve.” With that discovery, came a map. That map provided Tom with navigational tools to help him emerge from his crisis. It took nearly five years to straighten things out and several people on his team had to exit—or be exited. He recovered his legs and rediscovered his voice. In recent years Tom has shared his story with leaders both inside and outside the church and the response is always the same, *You too? I thought I was the only one!*

Studies among pastors show:

- 57 percent feel fulfilled yet discouraged, stressed and fatigued.
- 75 percent report a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.

- 80 percent report feeling unqualified or discouraged in their role of pastor at least one or more times in their ministry.¹⁶⁶
- 70 percent report they have a lower self-image now than when they first started.

About three years after dropping out, my husband and I returned to church.

Eventually I returned to ministry but this time on a large church staff in a supporting role. Our experience had filled me with compassion for pastors. When my second daughter left for college—I went back to school. My own wounding was the impetus for the topic of my doctoral dissertation. From the earliest field research interviews, I discovered the disconnect between expectations and reality were extremely common (of pastors toward ministry and laity toward pastors), as were the wounding and suffering that occur in ministry. Every pastor I talked to had wounding experiences. Most felt ill-prepared for the difficulties inherent in ministry. Many in my doctoral cohort corroborated, with several facing setbacks during our course of study. I recognized an opportunity to offer a deeper kind of support for clergy. I would seek to understand pastoral suffering and the tools that would help pastors process through their suffering in a productive way, helping them not only to survive but to thrive.

The source of suffering for many pastors (outside of the people) has to do with preparation and skill sets. Pastors are trained with the hard skills necessary for pastoring, but enter ministry with a dearth of soft skills needed to flourish in a church environment. Many pastors simply lack the tools necessary to succeed:

- 53 percent report seminary did not adequately prepare them for ministry.
- 90 percent feel they were not trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Pastoral Care Inc., “Statistics on the Ministry,” <https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>, accessed on November 11, 2020. All statistics in this section are from this website, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Daniel Goleman's seminal work on emotional intelligence (EQ) proposed success in life is only twenty percent dependent on cognitive skills. That means eighty percent of life's success stems from a range of other factors (everything from social class to timing to luck).¹⁶⁸ Some factors are beyond a person's control: a monk in Tibet in the fourth century might have dreamed up a personal computer, but Steve Jobs lived at the right time and place in history to make it happen. Fortunately, the most valuable factors for pastors today are within their control: what a pastor thinks, says and does. This book focuses on what pastors can affect most—themselves.

From experience, the authors accept suffering in ministry as inevitable. But suffering does not automatically equate to tragedy, in fact, suffering is a part of every story. What determines whether a story is a tragedy or a comedy is how the story ends. We want to provide pastors with navigational tools that lead to a good ending—not one of burn-out or drop-out, but of growth.

* * *

¹⁶⁸ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, 10th ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 34.

Churchcraft

The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, “It is good”; and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

—Isaiah 41:7 (ESV)

Tom’s first appointment was a two-point charge. The “big” church had forty-five in worship attendance (he grew it to sixty). The other church had twelve in worship attendance the first year but it dropped to eleven the following year because the only man died. Tom drove twenty-one miles one way for two years to preach to eleven senior citizens. Preaching on a regular basis proved more challenging than he expected but these two churches taught him many of the soft skills he did not learn in seminary.

Tom recalls Leona whose scowl appeared permanent, as if tattooed on her face. The only time he saw her smiling was after she attended a United Methodist Women’s conference (in fact, she glowed). But otherwise she only had this singular expression. One Sunday as Tom shook hands with congregants after the worship service he noticed Leona standing in line. She was wearing a wicked smile. Tom immediately thought to himself, *Uh oh, she’s smiling. Something must be wrong.* Leona stepped forward and said, “We studied Barclay in Sunday school too.” *Busted.* Her razor thin, lipsticked lips curled up even more. She had Tom in her grip, but it was not the grip of grace. He had lifted his three-point sermon directly from William Barclay’s commentary. And she knew it. Incredibly, Leona taught the exact same lesson in Sunday school that day. Tom gave the *encore* performance of Barclay. Fresh out of seminary, Tom had few life experiences that related to adults. He simply did not have enough material to preach Sunday after

Sunday. His message was limited. Before the internet, preachers used commentaries. “Sadder but wiser,” Tom’s first response to this shame was to cover his tracks better. With more experience, he learned to generate original material. Twenty-something pastors simply do not have many experiences on which to build their sermons. Forty years later—they have too many!

Yet, everyone has to start somewhere, even pastors. Seminaries help them get started. They are expert at training students with technical knowledge that is measurable as objective competencies. For example, pastors must have skills in biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics in relation to preaching, teaching, and disciple-making. These hard skills enable pastors to tackle job-specific duties and responsibilities. But pastors enter ministry less prepared with the soft skills they need.

Soft skills primarily relate to working well with others. They include a combination of social and emotional intelligence quotients, people skills, communication skills, and positive flexible attitudes (among other things). For example, pastors must learn the nuances of a setting before trying to implement a preconceived model of pastoral ministry. Soft skills complement hard skills and help pastors navigate the church environment with greater success. Soft skills are subjective competencies essential to a pastor’s longevity in ministry. This is Churchcraft.

Churchcraft comprises the navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills a leader needs to flourish in a church environment. This book picks up where seminaries leave off. It helps balance the technical abilities pastors learn in seminary with more personal and relational aspects of ministry.

Churchcraft was born from the concept of bushcraft, which is about the Aboriginal Australians having the skills necessary to survive in the Australian bush. While vacationing in Scotland, my family opted for a bushcraft excursion through a tour company. We were taken to the edge of the woods where a wild-haired young man named Zeke, emerged from the trees. He led us into the wilderness and showed us the crafty ways he is able to live in the Highlands with only a few basic supplies. He taught us how to see things in nature that others missed—like edible plants and tools for starting a fire (basically a string and a couple of sticks). He also taught us some skills, like how to make a porridge out of tree bark and how to sharpen a knife on a thick, spongy mushroom. Based on his experience, he was able to point out the best places to draw water and find shelter. It was this excursion that connected the idea of surviving in the wilderness with surviving in a church environment—which can also be kind of wild.

“Church” comes from the Greek word meaning, “called out ones.” “Craft” comes from an Old English word meaning “strength, skill.” Hence, Churchcraft is strengthening called out ones. Churchcraft provides a map for young pastors on the verge of burning out, mid-career pastors who have experienced a wounding, and pastors who feel the need to change environments every few years to keep recycling their limited knowledge (i.e. their bag of tricks). It can be helpful for seminarians too. Churchcraft is a toolkit for pastors who want to keep learning, growing, and honing their craft. Since pastoring is, at its core, about being in relationship—the most critical skills a pastor needs are not technical but relational in nature. Some pastors have high emotional intelligence quotients and natural aptitudes for relating to people, while others may learn as they go and be able to adapt. The study of Churchcraft is for those who desire more help.

Pastors are not the message but have the greatest message. Pastoring is a serious business but pastors who take themselves too seriously are headed for heartache. Pastoring is simultaneously the most rewarding work a person can do and the most difficult. Since many pastors feel beat-up already, this book will stay up-beat. Heart surgery is serious. Pastoring is serious too, but is not as serious as a heart attack. While pastors cannot save anyone's soul, they can point people in the right direction. Since pastoring is about helping others follow Jesus (the most radiant, joyful, life-giving person who ever lived), it can be approached with a lighter seriousness.

We want pastors not only to survive but to thrive. We want you to have a long and fruitful ministry. We want churches to flourish under your leadership. We want you to excel in pastoral care. We want you to be refreshed and your joy factor restored. Whether you are plagued by pride or self-doubt, new to ministry or an old-pro suddenly facing a crisis, or somewhere in between—we wrote this book for you because we want you to know you are not alone. And there's hope. And, we're rooting for you.

Reflection Questions: Where do you find yourself in the statistics? Which story do you most relate to and why? What do you wish you had learned in seminary that you didn't?

CHAPTER ONE:

IT'S ALL ABOUT PERCEPTIONS

Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Much of what happens to us is less about the thing and more about how we see the thing. It's all about perceptions. For over twenty-five years Tom has been writing one-minute Perceptions® scripts which air on five FM radio stations at 7:55 am Monday through Friday. His church pays for the air time. This is primarily an outreach to the community, not an invitation to come to their church. Through these scripts he invites listeners to perceive in a new way.

Each script consists of a simple story with a point. Since most people love stories they can lower resistance to the Christian faith (Jesus modeled this). Tom does not preach or spiritualize the message (although he occasionally uses Bible stories). His favorite stories include humor. The story is the point, not the church, although many people have joined the church because they listened to the scripts on the radio first. He has written over 6,000 scripts and turned them into nineteen books.

The word perception comes from the Latin, *percipere*, which means “to seize, to understand.” Perception is how sensory information is interpreted. A person's perception assigns meaning to a given stimulus and is influenced by experiences and beliefs. Perceptions can be crucial to surviving in a given environment. For example, when a woman approaches a street corner she uses her senses of sight and sound to determine when she can cross safely. Her perception is that walking into traffic can result in injury

or death. Her perception influences her perspective, which is her attitude toward the thing she is interpreting (in other words, her point of view). Perspective is the lens through which people view themselves, others, and the world around them. A person's perception of reality determines her perspective. For example, a driver's perspective may be that pedestrians need to be extremely careful because they are hard to see, and they are idiots. A pedestrian's perspective may be that drivers need to pay better attention because they are always distracted, and they are idiots.

Pastors enter ministry with certain perceptions, or misperceptions, such as: *I will be exempt from suffering because of my calling. I grew up loving my pastor so I also will be loved. My calling fortifies me against failure. If a person does everything right or has enough faith, they will not suffer. And I tend to do things 'right' and have 'more faith' than others so I will not suffer (much).* When pastors discover their congregants do not always love them, or their calling can cause them more suffering instead of less, or doing things right does not guarantee the absence of pain and suffering—they can become disoriented. These perceptions can lead them to believe: *I am not lovable. I am not called. I do not have enough faith.* A pastor may perceive that because he is suffering he must be a failure.

A better perception is that everyone suffers. And personal suffering possesses the power to increase understanding and compassion, which can strengthen a pastor's ministry to the hurting. When pastors manage to productively process through their suffering, they become better equipped to “nudge”¹⁶⁹ others toward healing and spiritual

¹⁶⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 28.

growth. In his book, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, Len Sweet describes evangelism as “nudging” people to pay attention to the work God is already doing in their lives. Nudgers see things others do not see, including the meaning of things. Because nudgers are perceptive, they intuitively find purpose in suffering and see it as an opportunity for growth with the possibility of redemption. With a new perception and tools to work through their ministry wounds, they can not only survive, but thrive. If they learn to compassionately guide others who are suffering, then their suffering finds purpose and begins to be redeemed. A new perception of suffering combined with certain tools and skills can lead pastors through their woundedness in a fruitful way. A new perception—suffering is normal for everyone, including pastors—leads to a new perspective: *Suffering does not make me a failure as a pastor, in fact, it might even make me a better one!* A new perspective toward woundedness helps generate a better outcome.

Holocaust survivor, Victor Frankl wrote, “Suffering ceases to be suffering when it finds meaning.”¹⁷⁰ When pastors are able to translate their failures, woundedness and suffering from ministry into a source of strength and grace for ministry it can help suffering find purpose—making a pastor’s suffering more sufferable.

In learning to cope productively with suffering, woundedness and the day-to-day challenges inherent in ministry, it helps to understand that others suffer too—maybe not at the same time or in the same way—but everyone suffers eventually. Pastors are not exempt. In some ways, pastors have a target on their backs. The sources of suffering and woundedness in ministry vary. Associate pastors tend to be shielded more from

¹⁷⁰ I figure a Holocaust survivor speaking on the topic of suffering is a credible source.

congregational wounding because their senior pastor absorbs the brunt. They are typically wounded through staff relations and organizational decisions. Solo pastors tend to get wounded most acutely through congregational relationships and usually struggle in isolation, especially those outside a denomination where fewer support systems are in place. Senior pastors get hit from many sides—staff and congregation, and potentially also from denominational hierarchy structures (#dspowertrips).

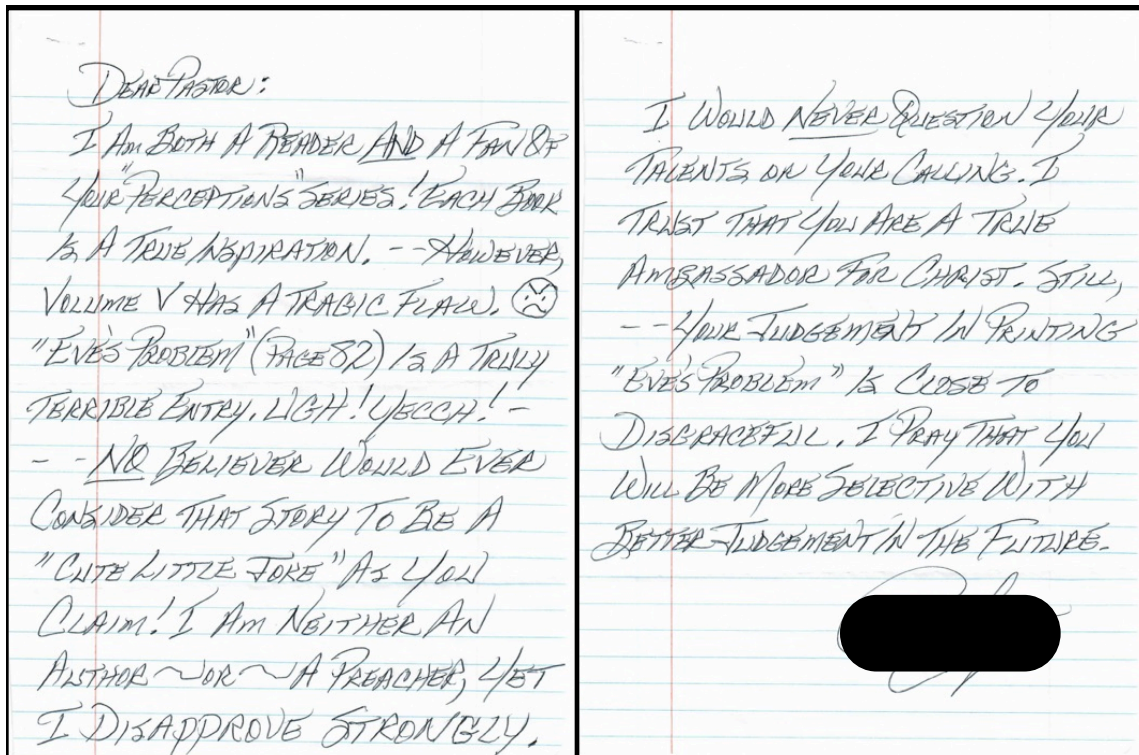
Regardless of the exact source, all pastors will at various points in their careers experience some form of hurtful behavior such as triangulation, sabotage, competition, criticism, insubordination, verbal barbs, and the emotional reactivity of others wanting them to conform and accommodate. Most who enter the pastorate are not prepared for the rejection and criticism that comes with it.¹⁷¹ The more human beings are involved and the more relationships that are in play—the more potential for pain. Pastors, like all helping professions, make their living and find their calling in being with and caring for others. As the saying goes: *Hurting people hurt people*. Wounded congregants wound. Even wounded healers inadvertently can become wounding healers. Everyone has blind spots. Dilemmas are inevitable. The question is not whether or not the pastor will face challenges, the question is how will the pastor respond to the challenges?

No pastor will be loved by everyone all the time, no matter how good they are or how hard they try. They just aren't. But let's be honest, pastors do not love all their congregants all the time either. Some believe pastoring would be great if it weren't for all people. Tom likes to say (tongue in cheek), "Ninety-five percent of the people are wonderful, but *oh that five percent*."

¹⁷¹ In my research, even those who "grew up in church" tended not to have realistic expectations. I found "preacher's kids" were more aware of and better prepared for the hardships inherent in ministry.

In fact, congregants may think of pastors only in terms of their role and forget they are actual people—with feelings—let alone fears, doubts, insecurities and struggles. Pastors often feel they must not show such signs of weakness but are supposed to be authentic anyway. They can only put forward their best selves. They must hide their imperfect selves to protect their true selves. In some ways, this is the plight of all leaders because leaders are supposed to instill confidence in those they lead. For pastors, the very act of leading can create more suffering for themselves. Every person will not love or agree with the pastor all the time. Pastoral leadership will upset people—mostly people who have their own agendas. Not all agendas are malicious, mind you; some are well-meaning but are just out of alignment with their pastor's leadership. Sometimes when people are upset it is because the pastor may be wrong. A perceptive pastor learns to filter the barrage of criticism and feedback, giving more weight to the more credible sources and less weight to the less credible sources. Not all criticism is wrong, but not all feedback is equal. Pastors learn this with experience.

When Tom received a complaint letter in the mail he had a policy: if the sender included their name, Tom would read it and respond. If the sender was anonymous, Tom would toss it in the trash unread, wait three hours, dig it out, and read it anyway. Several years ago, he worked out a system with his administrative assistant: now she sniffs out the anonymous complaint letters and files them in the trash without his knowledge. Some letters are encouraging, some hurt but they are fair, while others are hurtful and unfair. Occasionally he gets one like this:



This gentleman was referring to one of Tom's Perceptions® scripts. The offended letter-writer was not a member of the congregation but must have received or bought a book (older volumes turn up at garage sales around town). Naturally, Tom retrieved Volume V from his shelf and anxiously turned to page 82. This what he found:

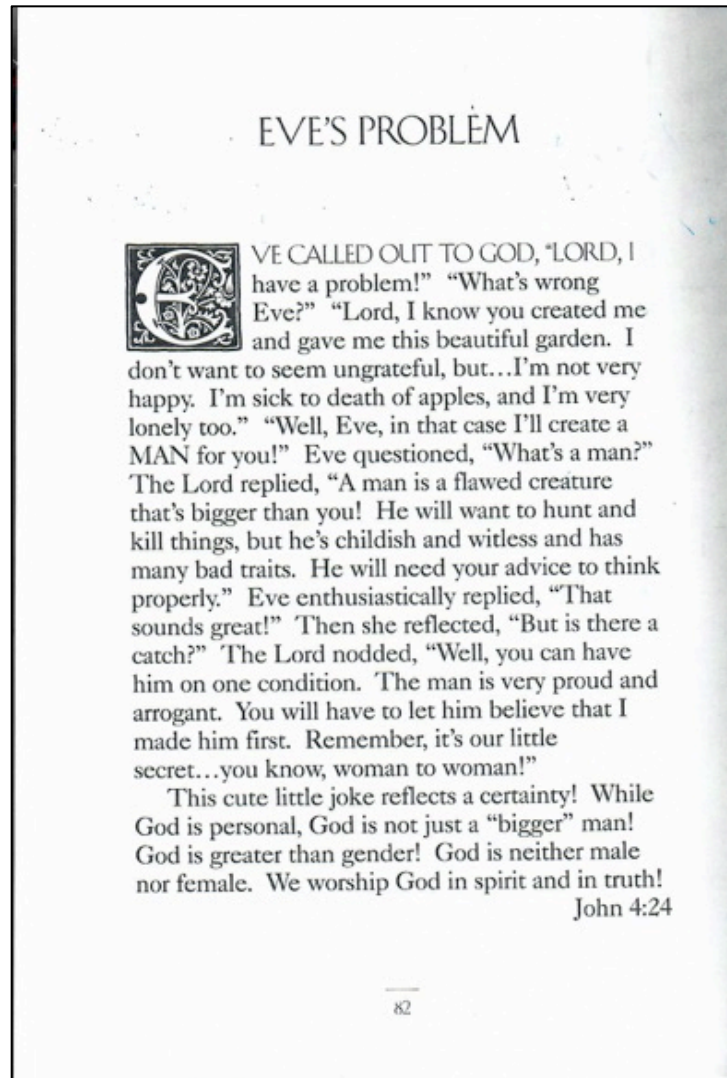


Figure 1. *Perceptions: Observations on Everyday Life, Vol. V.*
Reprinted with permission.

The script made him laugh. He did not recall the story so he checked the date: 2005. The script was 15 years old. Tom faced a dilemma. How would he respond? That Sunday he was preaching from John 3:22-30 in which John's disciples were upset about Jesus stealing John's thunder. The choice to be angry and offended or not was one of the application points. (Perhaps you can see where this is going.) Tom referenced the book, *Unoffendable* by Brant Hansen. And you guessed it, the letter became a sermon illustration. Tom could have responded in a variety of negative ways but he had tools in

his Churchcraft toolkit to help him interpret the situation with a better perception—a light-hearted one.

We know that being in ministry is overwhelmingly fulfilling but we know it is difficult too. We could even say 95 percent of the time ministry is wonderful, but *oh that five percent*. Fortunately, pastors have a script in scripture. The art of Churchcraft begins with a new perception—one that helps pastors interpret ministry and suffering through the biblical lens of comedy. Looking at the comic elements found in the Bible, and in Jesus' narrative will help pastors begin to reframe their own wounding experiences in a redemptive way.

Reflection Questions: What is your perception of pastoral suffering either from your own experience or someone else's? How do you handle criticism in your ministry?

CHAPTER TWO:

YOU CAN LAUGH OR YOU CAN CRY

To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain and play with it.
—Voltaire

The goal is not just to help pastors survive in ministry, but to thrive. This requires a new perception, one that interprets the incongruities of life more objectively and shows pastors how to respond to suffering in a way that gives their wounds a winsome effect. A pastor's wounds become attractive when they are viewed as normative and as having the potential to be used for good. When we are able to see a thing more objectively we may be able to find some humor in it. As Victor Frankl noted from his time in the concentration camps—to laugh at our suffering, if even for a moment, is to transcend it. Or as Tom says, “If I can laugh at a thing, it no longer owns me.” The goal here is not to make light of a serious subject but to subject it to a lighter sensibility. When we look at ministry (and life) as both a tragedy and comedy (not just one or the other) we learn to laugh at its incongruities. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “Every man is important if he loses his life; and every man is funny if he loses his hat and has to run after it.”¹⁷²

Frankl also taught that suffering ceases to be suffering when it finds meaning. That is gaining a new perception for ministry. When pastors have a new perception, they gain a new perspective. By first looking backward, pastors can perceive a better way to move forward.

* * *

¹⁷² G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 46.

The Dramatic Forms of Tragedy and Comedy

The world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel.

—Horace Walpole

Suffering has been the subject of drama throughout history. Tragedy and comedy are the chief kinds of drama known from Greek antiquity. Tragedy originated as a story with dire potential, but through the course of the play the characters reached a compromise and averted disaster. Comedy followed tragedy and celebrated the reconciliation of the adversaries. In time, the Greek tragedians shifted performances toward conflicts with no possible resolution—this impasse was mostly due to the characters' holding doggedly to their absolute positions. A fatal flaw, usually hubris, led to their demise as viewers watched in agony. The hubris of tragic heroes contrasted with the humility of comic heroes, whether it was inherent or something they learned along the way. With this development in tragedy, comedy could celebrate no reconciliation. "Thus emerged the comedians, who debunked tragic extremism and its unbending virtues and who proposed comic solutions to tragic impasses."¹⁷³ The role of the comedy became to redeem the tragedy.

Tragedy is characterized by individual story lines that, although they may begin happy, always include suffering and end in death. In contrast, comedy is characterized by groups of people who endure hardship but still end in happiness and union—often culminating in one or more weddings. Comedy usually begins unhappy or follows a "U" form, starting and ending happy but filled with trials, tribulations and suffering in the

¹⁷³ Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 1.

middle. In comedy, catastrophes and misfortunes are not irrevocable, and all will eventually be reconciled.¹⁷⁴ William Shakespeare held true to the classic construct in his plays. His tragedies include: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. These end with dead bodies everywhere. Shakespeare's comedies include: *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. The titles allude to their happy outcomes.

In tragedy, the hero is typically someone of high estate, a notable person, god-like or a descendent of the gods. Historically, the value of dramatic tragedy was that spectators had the satisfaction of seeing mortals, even of the highest status, were not beyond the reach of calamity.¹⁷⁵ In comedy, the hero was and is often antiheroic.

The point of tragedy is to get the audience to feel what the hero is feeling. The point of comedy is to help the audience emotionally detach themselves so they can see the situation from an objective point of view. Opinions differ as to whether or not a comedy must include humor. From a modern viewpoint, humor is what makes comedy "a comedy." Terry Lindvall, who wrote on the comic spirit of C.S. Lewis, noted, "Laughter offers this value: It can change and even correct one's perspective ... it chases out the fog and mists that so cloud our minds as we try to consider what is important."¹⁷⁶ Whether or not a comedy makes a person laugh, it at least includes some type of humor, even if it is dark.

¹⁷⁴ A. Philip McMahon, "Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 40 (1929) 189, doi:10.2307/310586.

¹⁷⁵ McMahon, "Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy," 161.

¹⁷⁶ Terry Lindvall, *Surprised by Laughter: The Comic World of C.S. Lewis*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 22.

Tragedy and comedy share four characteristics: a hero, a conflict, suffering and a response.¹⁷⁷ They both focus on the problematic side of human existence. Primarily, they seek to address the incongruities between the way things are and the way people think they should be. The hero of a tragedy is the embodiment of human greatness, while the hero of a comedy is the embodiment of human limitations.¹⁷⁸ Tragedy and comedy are two sides of the same coin. Both deal with the same types of problems, but what separates the tragedy from comedy is how the hero responds—which determines how the story ends.

* * *

The Bible as Comedy

My way of joking is to tell the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world.

—George Bernard Shaw

The Greeks developed the dramatic construct of tragedy and comedy as a way to address the incongruities of the human condition. The Bible, as literature, does the same thing. It shows Christians what is. The Bible contains the raw material of life, including controversial aspects, such as the Messiah having a shady family tree that includes the scandalous nature of his mother's quick marriage to Joseph. However, without some deeper meaning, life can appear to be an existential joke.¹⁷⁹ The Bible, as the Word of God, seeks to reveal life's meaning. It also gives humans a comic vision with which to

¹⁷⁷ John Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁹ I once knew a dolphin who had an existential crisis. He wondered if his life had porpoise.

navigate the incongruities of life. The Bible is candid in its storytelling, so as to give its readers a way forward with the promise of redemption.

The Hebrew writers, with their humorous sensibilities and desire for insight (over and against knowledge), were masters at telling stories with redemptive themes—especially ones where the underdogs are eventually vindicated and the proud brought down. This position is illustrated and articulated in both Testaments as the reader is told, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6, Prov. 3:34 NRSV). This position is also shown—by those characters who, in their pride, hold steadfastly to their absolute positions and unbending “virtues” and arrive at tragic impasses—as we see with Pharaoh, Jezebel, Haman and Herod. Conversely, a Hebrew slave is made vizier of Egypt, a Hebrew orphan becomes the queen of Persia, a shepherd becomes king of Israel, and an unwed teenager becomes the mother of God.

Consider the characteristics of comedy: Groups of people (less so individuals) endure hardship (though the catastrophes and misfortunes are not irrevocable), ending with reconciliation, happiness, and union (often illustrated by a wedding). According to the criteria, the Bible is a comedy.

The Metanarrative of Scripture

The big story of scripture follows the “U” shape. It begins with a garden party and ends with a wedding—but the second act is a long one. The middle is mostly about people who endure hardship. The last words of the Old Testament are “curse” or “utter destruction.” The last words of the New Testament are “the grace of the Lord Jesus be

with you all.” The metanarrative ends with references to the church as the Bride of Christ and the marriage supper of the Lamb.¹⁸⁰

Some of the Bible’s subplots are cautionary tales while others are comeuppance stories, but as Hebrews 11 reminds readers, Bible characters with a comic vision operated from a bigger perspective. In the midst of tribulations, they could trust God for a better future. When it came to his own suffering, Jesus took the long view, too: “... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2 ESV). Through Jesus, God reconciled sinners in eternal union with him. The biggest catastrophe, “the fall,” was not irrevocable, but only God could redeem it; likewise, he defeated life’s ultimate incongruity—death.

A second consideration is the communal aspect of the metanarrative.¹⁸¹ The Israelites, as a people group, often found themselves pitted against various pagan nations. But more so, as a community, they often pitted themselves against God. The literary construct of the Bible is found in Israel’s story of origin. Abraham’s name means “father of a multitude” for the Lord said, “I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:5 ESV). The promised child of Abraham and Sarah was called Isaac, which means, “laughter.” Sarah prophetically said, “God has given me laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me” (Gen. 21:6 CEB). And God renamed Jacob “Israel,” because of his feisty tenacity: “... because you struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” (Gen. 32:28 NIV). The names of Israel’s patriarchs hold within them the promise of a community that will face calamity yet maintain a perspective that all will be

¹⁸⁰ Rev. 19:6-10; 22:17; 22:21 ESV.

¹⁸¹ However, the communal nature of God’s story does not mean that individuals are not important to him. Otherwise, the Bible would not contain so many lists of names.

made right eventually. The arrival of the Messiah signifies the climax of the metanarrative. The story of Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection marks the turning point.

The Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection as Comedy

Paradoxes and inconceivable incongruities characterize the kingdom of God story, beginning with an incarnate God, interrupted by a crucified Messiah and turned upside down by a resurrected body.¹⁸² The narrative of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection—which is retold during communion and recited in the Apostles' Creed is—at its core, a comedy. Seeing it as a comedy is a brilliant perception that has been understood throughout church history but has tragically become lost to many Christians in a modern context.

For example, Christmastide used to be celebrated with wild festivals and carnival rituals such as the Feast of Fools, which embodied the Magnificat: "He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed" (Luke 1:52-53 CEB). In the Feast of Fools a boy was elected mock bishop, high and low officials exchanged places, and ecclesiastical rituals were parodied. These carnival antics kept the clergy from taking themselves too seriously and the rituals from becoming worshipped; it subverted the old order with a revolutionary new one. When God became flesh (*carne*), He was born as a human child to a common people—in true carnival style—a baby was made king.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Charles L. Campbell, "Ministry with a Laugh." *Interpretation* 69, no. 2 (April 2015): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314564828>.

¹⁸³ Campbell, "Ministry with a Laugh," 199.

Paul engaged the upside-down rhetoric demonstrated by the Feast of Fools in his first letter to the Corinthians: “But God chose what the world considers foolish to shame the wise. God chose what the world considers weak to shame the strong. And God chose what the world considers low-class and low-life—what is considered to be nothing—to reduce what is considered to be something to nothing” (1 Cor. 1:27-28 CEB).

For the Romans, a culture in which hierarchy and rank were paramount, the crucifixion was a complex political joke. It was a parodic exaltation, in which a lowly slave or criminal who acted “above his rank” was mockingly treated as a king. In carnival fashion the fool was crowned and “worshipped.” The placard which read, “The King of the Jews” was part of the Roman mockery of Jesus. “A common understanding of crucifixion was enthronement, and the connection between the lifting up¹⁸⁴ of the crucified and the raising up of the king made for a good laugh.”¹⁸⁵ In light of the parodic exaltation John 19—in which the soldiers mock Jesus as “King of the Jews”—takes on new meaning. The scourging was an effort to humble the Galilean upstart without executing him. When Pilate showed the bloodied figure to the crowd he said, “Behold the man!” as if to say, *See? He’s not a king. He has learned his lesson. Let’s be done with it.*¹⁸⁶ The people refused. Pilate reluctantly proceeded with the mock exaltation (execution). When he presented Jesus the second time, he said, “Behold your King!” and asked, “Shall I crucify your King?”¹⁸⁷ The crowd’s response indicated they were in on the

¹⁸⁴ The Greek word *hypsōō* means to elevate (figuratively or literally)—lift up, exalt.

¹⁸⁵ Campbell, “Ministry with a Laugh,” 201.

¹⁸⁶ John 19:5 ESV.

¹⁸⁷ John 19:14-15 ESV.

political joke. For the rank-obsessed Romans, this vulgar parody was a fitting punishment for any conquered person who rebelled or thought too highly of himself. Fredrick Buechner writes, “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ (Matt. 27:11) you with pants that don’t fit and split lip; in the black comedy of the sign they nailed over his head where the joke was written out in three languages so nobody would miss the laugh.”¹⁸⁸

Jesus’ followers, who truly believed in him as king, had to make sense of his humiliating death. Here, the New Testament writers turned the empire’s political joke on its head. They chose to take the parodic exaltation of Jesus as literal. Paul proclaimed, “It is a wisdom that none of the present-day rulers have understood, because if they did understand it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory!” (1 Cor. 2:8 CEB). At the heart of Paul’s statement is the classic rhetorical trick of the fool and the jester: ironic literalism.¹⁸⁹ Figuratively the Romans made Jesus a king in an attempt to show what he was not; they exalted him in mockery. The apostles made a negation of the negation: Jesus, a king worthy of enthronement, was raised to his rightful place in glory—the cross became his literal throne, the crucifixion his coronation. Herein lies the comic spirit: The inconceivable incongruity of a crucified Messiah and a God who pulls the powerful down, lifts the lowly up and uses the foolish to shame the wise. “For Christians, crucifixion laughter is the subversive, ironic, paradoxical laughter inherent in *Good*

¹⁸⁸ Fredrick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel As Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977), 90.

¹⁸⁹ Campbell, “Ministry with a Laugh,” 202.

Friday.”¹⁹⁰ It is what Aslan told the children about his death on the stone table, “There is a magic deeper still.”¹⁹¹

Another inconceivable incongruity is a resurrected body. History’s biggest plot twist turns Jesus’ play-within-a-play from a tragedy to a comedy!

Jesus spent the first day of his new life playing jokes on people, incognito. When he joined Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, Jesus asked, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” They stopped dead in their tracks, their faces downcast. Cleopas replied, “Are you the *only* visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?” They were probably thinking, *Where has this guy been? In a cave or something?* Deadpan, Jesus replied, “What things?” (Luke 24:17-19 CEB, emphasis added). Jesus kept popping in and out of locked rooms and scaring the disciples out of their first-century sandals.¹⁹² Unfortunately, the surprise proved almost too much for them: Jesus had to rebuke the disciples for their unbelief. (In fairness, he did try to warn them.)

The crucifixion is dark humor, but the resurrection is a laughing matter. Historically, a ritual known as *Risus Paschalis*, or Easter Laughter, has been observed among many high church traditions. Priests told jokes and stories, and parishioners’ humorous antics incited uproarious laughter that embodied the liberating, life-giving nature of Christ’s victory over death.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 203.

¹⁹¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 159.

¹⁹² If the moment were captured in a meme, it would read, “I’m baaaaaack!”

In some traditions, the divine comedy of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is a profound theological joke played on the Devil: God came like a wily trickster to lure the Devil into a trap. The vulnerable appearance of the incarnation fooled the Devil and he took the bait. By putting Jesus to death, the Devil was taken captive and then overcome by the resurrection. This joke resounds with a satisfied laugh as the world's power was made subservient to God's power.¹⁹³

Considering this theological joke in light of the larger narrative of scripture, it is not too surprising that Jesus would help perpetrate an elaborate prank on the Devil. Jesus' forbearer, Jacob—the patriarch for whom the people Israel was named—was the trickiest trickster of them all. Jacob's name literally means, “deceiver.” Although Jesus was without sin, the propensity to play tricks ran in his blood. This is another biblical incongruity that is difficult for Christians to reconcile. However, Jesus tricked his brothers into going to Jerusalem without him in John 7:1-10 and commended the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-8. And consider this head-scratcher from 1 Kings 22:19-23:

And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’ Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has declared disaster for you.”

Again, Jesus comes by it honestly.

¹⁹³ Campbell, “Ministry with a Laugh,” 204.

The dramatic comedy of Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection shows how Jesus' suffering and death was turned on its head through ironic literalism: how he endured the pain, suffering and humiliation of the cross and how God used it for good. Like Jesus, pastors can endure pain, suffering and humiliation—and trust God will also work it for good.¹⁹⁴ This perspective gives pastors hope that their suffering can find meaning, too. And that their tragedies work together for good.

* * *

In Defense of Comedy

He's a laugher, and laughers are rare.

—Herb Gardner, *A Thousand Clowns*

Christians tend to engage in an on-again, off-again relationship with comedy. Predominately it is off-again. In the third, fourth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Christian leaders condemned the theater for corrupting public morals. While tragedy maintained a modicum of value for the common good, moralists bitterly attacked and prohibited comedy.

Christians largely reject comedy because of the seriousness of sin and the humiliation of the cross. But they also conflate laughter and playfulness with paganism and deemed them ill-suited for Christian devotion and piety. According to author and professor Conrad Hyers, the early church father John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407), with his ascetic sensibilities, preached that people should assemble to weep for their sins, not to

¹⁹⁴ Rom. 8:28 ESV. The Greek word *synergeō* is translated “works together” from which comes the English word, “synergy.” Synergy is the cooperation of two more things to produce a combined effect that is greater than the sum of their separate effects. It is encouraging to know God is using synergy in our present sufferings to create a glorious outcome.

laugh and play—that was not from God but the Devil.¹⁹⁵ In contrast, the reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) taunted the Devil with fart jokes.¹⁹⁶

Tragedy and comedy relate closely. Comedy, characterized by the comic vision, provides an alternative to the tragic vision and its consequences.¹⁹⁷ Comedy can redeem tragedy because comedic heroes survive by learning to laugh at themselves:

When human beings lose all sense of comic in relation to themselves, their convictions, and their suspicions, tragic collisions are inevitable. Only insofar as we learn to take our ideologies and beliefs less absolutely, our self-images less seriously, do we have a chance of softening tragic extremes and tragic extremism.¹⁹⁸

To have meaning, humor needs a backdrop of seriousness. Sufferings in life provide a foil. Comedy does promise a happy ending, but its greatest value is that it shows Christians how to live with a lighter sensibility in the midst of difficult circumstances.

* * *

¹⁹⁵ Hyers, *And God Created Laughter*, 27.

¹⁹⁶ Anderson, “A Brief Systematic Theology of Humor,” 19.

¹⁹⁷ Hyers, *And God Created Laughter*, 113.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

What Makes Things Funny?

A priest, a rabbi and a minister walk into a bar.

The bartender says, “What is this, a joke?”

Our discussion of comedy has been in regard to the dramatic form but we should also consider what makes things funny since humor is a common—if not necessary—element found in comedy. The primary impetus of humor is surprise. Surprise is often achieved through juxtaposition, or placing two things side by side to create a new third thing. Surprise and juxtaposition inciting laughter gives us some indication that Jesus’ parables were funny to his original audience who were hearing things for the first time (surprise!) and in their original context. Related to that, humor is most common within a shared community. Jokes may provide comic relief but the best humor uses “narraphor,” meaning it is an illustrative story about real people, in real settings, facing real issues and problems.¹⁹⁹

Tom’s first appointment, Lenora, is now a ghost town. One congregant, Elnora (from Lenora) whose husband (the only man in the congregation), died brought her 5-year-old grandson to church with her. One Sunday he escaped from the pew during the sermon. He wandered to the front and spent a few minutes stomping on the cushions at the prayer rail. Tom could see him from the corner of his eye but kept preaching and “willing” the kid back to his seat. Then the boy climbed under the rail, onto the chancel and disappeared from Tom’s sight—for five to six minutes. Tom knew the boy was

¹⁹⁹ From Dr. Leonard Sweet: Narrative + Metaphor = Narraphor. I’m applying the term to story-based humor and the meaning it conveys.

behind him but did not know what to do. He did not turn around to look. He just—kept—preaching. Eventually the boy wandered back to the pew. When Tom returned for church that evening he asked Elnora from Lenora about her grandson’s activity during the sermon. She replied matter-of-factly, “He tried to blow out the candles on the communion table.” For five or six minutes, while Tom kept—preaching, and no one giggled or even cracked a smile. Clearly, humor is subjective.

Humor in a classic comedy is serious about pointing out life’s absurdities and helping us laugh at the human condition by using irony, parody, satire, and other comedic devices. While the best humor is about reality, it is not always strictly factual. A good storyteller will exaggerate and elaborate some facts while downplaying and omitting others. An example of Jesus using exaggeration is when he talked about removing the log from our own eye. Humor is empowering because it gives the “outs” a way to poke fun at the “ins.” Again, we see this with Jesus’ teachings, as he often sided with the down-and-outs over the religious elites. Humorist David Sedaris and comedian Steve Martin both emphasize the value of poking fun at themselves (though not to the point of degradation). It is by laughing at ourselves and inviting others to laugh with us, that we help them be able to laugh at themselves. Some suffering, if given enough time, can be remembered with a laugh, or at least a smile. Memory “supplies us with information—some true, some false, and always incomplete—that we use to construct stories ... and the story that it tells is as often directed to the future as to the past.”²⁰⁰ It is said that time heals all wounds. Distance from the painful or frightful event and a faulty memory about the event leads to creative and healing storytelling about the event.

²⁰⁰ Michael C. Corballis, *The Wandering Mind: What the Brain Does When You’re Not Looking* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 32-33.

We are not suggesting you preach next Sunday with an arrow prop through your head, do the Woody Woodpecker laugh, or intro your sermon with a stand-up routine; and no impersonations from the pulpit either (Tom learned that in Lenora, too). Humor is highly subjective (as the Lenora congregation proved) and in a church setting, it can be risky. One pastor we know refuses to use humor at all because he feels it could offend someone somewhere. For our purposes, comedy is less about trying to make people laugh and more about being a laughier.

* * *

Does Jesus Have A Sense Of Humor?

The one who rules in heaven laughs; my Lord makes fun of them.

—Psalm 2:4 (CEB)

Does Jesus have a sense of humor?

Yes.

How do we know?

1. He thought his mother was a virgin.
2. His first miracle was a party trick.²⁰¹
3. He was supported by women.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Anderson, “A Brief Systematic Theology of Humor,” 16. According to John 2:6 it was not a skimpy miracle either. Jesus turned between 120-180 gallons of water into fine wine. Anderson observed, “Sadly, for fundamentalists John 2 is the chapter that comes right before John 3.”

²⁰² Mark 15:41.

4. He asked a blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?”²⁰³
5. He never gave a straight answer.²⁰⁴

* * *

What Laughter Does

As God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly.

—Arthur Carlson, “WKRP in Cincinnati” (the turkey-drop episode)

More than anything laughter interrupts. It takes what we know or what we think we know and disrupts it.²⁰⁵ We use phrases like: Crack up, break up, erupt, LOL, ROFL, and die laughing.

Laughter is paradoxical. Laughter can build up and tear down. It can heal and destroy. It can be joyfully inclusive and painfully exclusive. It can shame people into conformity and it can resist oppression. Laughter can cause us to withdraw and it can open us up to new ideas.

Laughter is communal. Laughter is unusual in solitary settings because it is primarily a communal, instinctive call-and-response vocalization.²⁰⁶ It is an unplanned emotional response. It is unconscious, uncensored, and contagious. Laughter happens more in the course of casual conversation than in response to a comedic prompt. “The

²⁰³ Albert Radcliffe, *The Bible as Comedy: Humour as Hope* (Manchester, UK: Pendlebury Press Limited, 2017), 209. Jesus’ ministry was preaching, teaching and healing. Because of the outcome, all healing accounts as comedy. Because of Jesus’ radiant personality, much of his teaching and preaching was too.

²⁰⁴ Radcliffe, *The Bible as Comedy*, 252. Jesus attempted to humanize the law by encouraging his followers to behave with the utmost generosity of spirit toward others.

²⁰⁵ Campbell, “Ministry with a Laugh,” 196.

²⁰⁶ Robert R. Provine, “Laughing, Tickling, and the Evolution of Speech and Self.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13, no. 6 (2004): 217, www.jstor.org/stable/20182960.

necessary stimulus for laughter is not a joke but another person ... If you want more laughter in your life, seek out friends not a comedy video, or if you desire some comic relief, view the video with friends.”²⁰⁷

Laughter is not passive. A laughter-filled life takes intentionality, but it can be cultivated. How? “Be interesting and be interested in other people. Do interesting things. Talk about these things. Listen with genuine attention to others talk about their lives. Laugh at the right places. Applaud, if necessary. Be engaged. Be funny. Tell stories ... be alive.”²⁰⁸

After all, that’s what Jesus did.

Reflection Questions: How might the Bible as comedy affect your reading of scripture?

What role does laughter play in your ministry?

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 215.

²⁰⁸ Richard Darden, *Jesus Laughed: The Redemptive Power of Humor* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 128.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE PERCEPTIVE GENIUS OF JESUS

Only if we are secure in our beliefs can we see the comical side of the universe.

—Flannery O'Connor

Christians tend to relate to Jesus in his suffering by leaping directly to the passion—betrayed by a friend, falsely accused and wrongly arrested, given a sham trial, rejected, flogged, mockingly worshipped, ridiculed, publicly humiliated, and crucified. Any amount of suffering Christians experience is more bearable in contrast to what Jesus endured. Yet by reflexively jumping to the worst of his suffering, pastors tend to overlook the day-to-day challenges Jesus encountered as a preacher, teacher, and healer; suffering that actually makes him more relatable to the average person. As with Jesus, many pastors experience the tension of being both accepted (even loved) and rejected (sometimes hated) by those they serve. Along with the overwhelming positives of ministry, they also endure hardship. Most pastors will experience opposition during their careers, even among the best congregations.

The passion can help pastors relate to a major wounding event, but it is also helpful to see how Jesus dealt with more typical challenges which reflect an average pastorate in several ways. Although the church had not yet been born, Jesus modeled the art of Churchcraft.²⁰⁹ In Jesus' three years of ministry he had to deal with many of the same types of strains and stressors in ministry that occur today. The commonalities stem

²⁰⁹ Of course, the church was *his* idea.

from relationships with people. Matthew 15:1-20 examined within its larger context shows how Jesus used the tools of Churchcraft which are the focus of this book. In particular, he maintained personal agency (the power to choose), he self-differentiated, and embodied a comic spirit.²¹⁰ Thus he dealt with potential woundings. To put it in the vernacular: Haters gonna hate. Jesus knew how to shake it off.

The Setting

The key players in Matthew 15 are Jesus, the disciples, the Pharisees, and the crowd. Earlier, Jesus already found himself at odds with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law: they criticized him and his disciples for working on the sabbath. This interaction incited a plot against his life (12:1-14).²¹¹ In another exchange, they accused Jesus of doing the Devil's work (12:22-30). After teaching several parables on the kingdom of God, Jesus returned to his backwater hometown of Nazareth, and managed to offend the townsfolk (13:53-58). Soon after, Jesus received word that his one true partner in ministry—his cousin John—was dead (14:1-12). Jesus, possibly in shock from the news, was not able to sit Shiva, so he sought solitude to grieve and pray. But the crowd pursued. On a hillside beside the lake, Jesus succumbed to compassion and miraculously fed 5,000 men, plus women and children (14:13-21). After caring for the crowd, he hastily shooed the disciples away so he could finally be alone to pray. Early the next morning, as the disciples struggled through a storm on the lake, Jesus walked to them on the water. Those in the boat were amazed. They worshipped Jesus, saying “Truly you are the Son of God”

²¹⁰ What goes without being said is the “suffering servant” had a robust theology of suffering.

²¹¹ All scripture references in the case study are from the Gospel of Matthew ESV, unless otherwise noted.

(14:22-33). Word of the miraculous feeding traveled quickly; Pharisees dispatched from Jerusalem to challenge Jesus once again.

The Story

The case study begins as the Pharisees triangulated with Jesus and his disciples. Triangulation is a relational situation in which two people in conflict draw in a third person to facilitate communication and allow for the original two to avoid dealing with one another directly. This happens in churches often. The Pharisees fussed at Jesus instead of interacting with the disciples directly. They asked him, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat” (15:2). Additionally, by criticizing the disciples, they in effect criticized Jesus.

According to Jewish custom, saying grace follows the ritual handwashing.²¹² Handwashing then (unlike today) was not about hygiene, but ritual purity. What is noticeably missing from the feeding of 5,000 story of chapter 14 is any reference to the customary handwashing. In verse 19, Jesus breached this protocol when he gave thanks for the fish and the loaves with unwashed hands. He did so in front of 10-15,000 eyewitnesses. Nevertheless, in 15:3-9 Jesus volleyed: he asked why the Pharisees give preference to the traditions of men over the commandments of God. The religious leaders had found a loophole in the system which allowed them to keep their wealth under the guise of dedicating it to God instead of using it to care for and honor their parents, which is one of the big ten. Even the experts in the law were not keeping the whole law.²¹³ Jesus

²¹² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2008), 242.

²¹³ Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ: A Significant But Often Unrecognized Aspect of Christ's Teaching* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 117.

called them out in public and then raised the stakes. He turned to the crowd and said, “Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person” (15:10-11). In a flash, Jesus undermined the dietary laws which the Pharisees loved to love and chastised them for their showy, false, and burdensome dogma.

Now it was the disciples’ turn to react and triangulate. They pulled Jesus aside and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (15:12). Triangulation also plagues leaders today, but a cultural understanding helps illuminate this story. According to authors E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, Jesus lived in a time and place that often characterized a moral code of honor versus shame. People tended to be externally motivated to bring public honor, not public shame, on themselves, their family, their employer, and so forth. In first century Judea, honor was considered a limited good, and public debates were considered contests in which honor was either won or lost. The audience determined the winner: “If you silenced your opponent, you gained honor and they lost some.”²¹⁴ In light of the ongoing “honor game” the Pharisees played with Jesus, they wanted him dead—not because he was preaching, teaching, and healing—but because every time they sparred with him, they lost honor. These poor guys did not know they taking on the Muhammad Ali of the honor game. To regain their honor, the religious leaders needed to publicly disgrace Jesus. (Dying like a criminal would do the trick.) Additionally, in an honor versus shame culture, when a person actually seeks information, he asks questions in private. For

²¹⁴ E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 129.

example, Peter asked for an explanation to the parable in verse 15. Also, some Pharisees did want to learn; we see this when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night (John 3:1-2).

Jesus responded to the disciples' concern with back-to-back metaphors: "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (15:13). This was a direct reference to the parable of the weeds (13:24-30) in which Jesus explained that the wheat and the weeds would be allowed to grow together until the time of judgment. Clearly, the Pharisees symbolized the weeds in this scenario—not a compliment. He quickly followed with, "Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" (15:14). Notably Jesus dismissed the disciples' concerns about offending the sensibilities of those only concerned about themselves. He iterated: those who should be guiding others were themselves blind.

Jesus employed irony in his latter metaphor. In his healing ministry, Jesus would ask a blind person if he *wanted* to be healed. He was really asking if the blind person was ready to take on the responsibility and challenges inherent in being healed—that is, of gaining sight. In other words, the blind person could no longer depend on charity but would have to earn a living with no marketable skills. What makes this ironic is that in their culture, blind beggars could not make a living, but they did offer a service to their community. They provided the opportunity for pious people to fulfill their obligation "to God" by giving to the poor. The giver received public praise in return:

The traditional beggar does not say, "Excuse me, Mister, do you have a few coins for a crust of bread?" Instead, he sits in a public place and challenges the passerby with "Give to God!" He is really saying, "My needs are beside the point. I am offering you a golden opportunity to fulfill one of your obligations to God. Furthermore, this is a public place and if you give to me here, you will gain a reputation as an honorable, compassionate, pious person."²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 173.

When a beggar received money, he would stand up and loudly proclaim the giver to be noble and honorable and then invoke a blessing on him and his family. The crowd probably snickered at Jesus' reference to the Pharisees playing the role of blind beggars who publicly honored *themselves*. In Matthew 15 Jesus used the blind guide metaphor for the first time, but it fit so well he used it five more times when he roasted the Pharisees in chapter 23.

The Pharisees saw themselves like this...



Figure 2. James Tissot (French, 1836-1902). *The Tribute Money (Le denier de César)*, 1886-1894. Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper, Image: 7 5/8 x 10 7/16 in. (19.4 x 26.5 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Purchased by public subscription, 00.159.206. Reprinted with permission.

Jesus portrayed an image of them like this...



Figure 3. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind*, 1568, tempera on canvas, Web Gallery of Art, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_The_Parable_of_the_Blind_Leading_the_Blind_-_WGA3511.jpg, Public domain.

Again, it was not a compliment.

In the next scene, Peter, seeking understanding (not honor), asked Jesus to explain the parable. Jesus used a word that is found only one time in all of scripture. He said, “Are you also *still* without understanding?” (15:16, emphasis added). The Greek word, *akmen*, is equivalent to “even now, even yet” and indicates a strong point. Since the parable seems obvious, perhaps he responded in an exaggerated tone for comedic effect: *Oy vey, Peter! You still don’t get it?* Jesus followed up with a bit of bathroom humor in verse 17 to drive the message home, essentially saying that food goes in one end and out the other; it does not affect character. Then Jesus illustrated his meaning about what

makes a person unclean by providing a list of vices.²¹⁶ Jesus' bottom line: Handwashing is external. Food is transient. Of greater concern is the heart.

Back to Setting

When Christians examine the context of scripture, it is important to look at the order in which events appear. "The biblical authors were intentional about the sequence in which they presented events, even if they weren't preoccupied with historical, chronological order. Westerners can focus so much on the time (chronology) that we miss the timing (the meaning of the sequence) in a biblical passage."²¹⁷ After this exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus and the disciples traveled to Phoenicia, where they encountered a Gentile woman whose daughter was demon possessed (15:21-28). The disciples urged Jesus to send her away. At first Jesus appeared to be rude to the woman, but as the scene played out, the two bantered intelligently. Jesus referenced Gentiles as dogs, which in Jewish culture were only slightly less reviled than pigs. The woman quipped that even dogs get to eat bread crumbs that fall from the master's table. Her come-back pleased the Master. And Jesus' interaction with her elevated her standing in the eyes of the disciples.

The next event was the feeding of 4,000, which played out almost exactly as the first miraculous feeding. With unwashed hands, Jesus said grace over the meal and broke the bread. Clearly, he had chosen not to accommodate the Pharisees in their concern over ritual handwashing. As if on cue, the religious leaders returned, but this time rival sects of Pharisees and Sadducees united around a common purpose—shaming Jesus.

²¹⁶ In that day it was customary to make lists, but they were not intended to be exemplary vices, exhaustive, or ranked in any particular order. Paul was a consummate list maker.

²¹⁷ Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*, 149.

After the second miraculous feeding, they asked (of all things!) for a sign—maybe they forgot to pack a lunch and were secretly hoping to be fed. Jesus indirectly referenced their blindness and inability to lead once again, saying (with perhaps more than a hint of sarcasm), “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (16:1-3). Remembering the disciples’ concern for the Pharisees’ honor, Jesus warned them against the leaven of the Pharisees’ teaching, using a bread metaphor. The disciples’ response? *We didn’t bring any bread*. At this point I imagine Jesus rubbing his temples and praying under his breath, *Father, grant me patience* (16:5-12).

The next event forms the bookend. Jesus privately asked the disciples who the people perceive him to be. They answered with various prophets. And who do the disciples perceive him to be? Peter affirmed their earlier confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus blessed Peter, “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (16:16-17). And then he warned them not to tell. Indeed, the disciples possessed greater spiritual sight than their own “spiritual” leaders.

The Metaphor

A key metaphor for Matthew 15:1-20 is the blind leading the blind. Spiritual understanding—“blindness”—exists in varying degrees. The teachers of the law should have been guiding others in the things of God, but they themselves were blind. Pride, love of honor, and religious show darkened their understanding. Unlike Jesus, they took themselves far too seriously. For the Pharisees to gain sight would require them to learn a new way of functioning. Most of them were not willing to do so. Nicodemus is the

notable exception. When Jesus applied this metaphor to the Pharisees, Jesus directly referenced the parable of the sower: “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (13:13).

However, the crowds who followed Jesus were like the man born blind in John 9. They, too, were born blind “that the works of God might be displayed in their lives” (9:3). For any who would receive it, Jesus offered a healing touch that would radically transform their lives. They were the spiritually blind who needed guidance.

The disciples were like the blind man from Bethsaida: they saw people “like trees, walking” (Mark 8:24). They were slowly gaining their vision. They were being prepared to guide the early church and pass on the faith but they still had much to learn. Unlike the Pharisees, the disciples’ hearts were open—they had “eyes to see,” and in time they did. Just as Nicodemus is the notable exception among the Pharisees, Judas is the exception among the disciples. If he had waited a few days, and not killed himself, his perception could have radically changed. He would have witnessed the resurrection and (like Peter) had the opportunity for reconciliation.

Jesus alone has 20/20 vision and sees all things with perfect clarity. Much of the hardship pastors face in life and in ministry is the result of blindness, either their own or someone else’s. Pastors face opposition, or create it, because they cannot see eye-to-eye or fail to consider a situation in the context of the bigger picture. Fortunately, pastors can look to Jesus for insight on how to handle such challenges.

Application

The Matthew 15 passage contains parallels to the church at Laodicea: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched,

pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Jesus counseled that church to buy from him, “salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” (Rev. 3:17-18 ESV).

Ultimately, being a pastor is about becoming a “little Christ” because the pastor, more than anyone, seeks to incarnate Jesus in his daily living. Jesus modeled how to “shake off” various everyday challenges that potentially wound a spiritual leader: he demonstrated personal agency, self-differentiation, and comic spirit as powerful tools for Churchcraft.

Today, pastors and preachers are tasked with guiding the church. As church leaders, they are charged with reading the signs of the times and knowing what to do. All pastors have limitations: Pastors deal with the stressors of a relational vocation. But a perceptive pastor humbly and diligently seeks understanding because he does not want to blindly lead others into a ditch ...



Like the two disciples in Emmaus whose eyes were opened at the breaking of the bread, pastors have the opportunity for their eyes to be opened too. Continuing in

Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” Jesus won’t require us to wash our hands first, but in our current context, we probably should.

Jesus perceived life in a way that allowed and indeed expected suffering. He took the challenges of life and ministry in stride. Jesus self-differentiated. The tool proved vital: in the larger section of Matthew, he was called a servant of Beelzebub, dismissed as the son of a carpenter, accused of leading lawbreakers, honored as a prophet, hailed as the Son of David, and worshipped as the Son of God. But he knew who he was and did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.²¹⁸ Jesus cared about others, but he also knew where he ended and they began. He thought clearly, objectively, and creatively about each situation in which he found himself. He maintained a calm, non-anxious presence in the midst of trials. The disciples wanted to react emotionally to the Pharisees (Matt. 15:12), but Jesus chose to act responsibly. In a later scene, the disciples rejected a Gentile woman for being a Gentile woman (and a pest).²¹⁹ But Jesus saw her as a person (one with *chutzpah*). He did not accommodate the dysfunction of those with limited understanding. Teachers of the law enjoyed nothing more than endlessly debating the nuances of the law. They wanted to play the honor game. Jesus played it and won, soundly and repeatedly. It was only in his hometown that he could not gain honor. Because he was self-differentiated, he simply moved on.

Although Jesus rarely gets credit for being funny or for cracking jokes, he actually embraced a comic spirit. Misreading scripture, being under familiar with the cultural

²¹⁸ John 2:24-25, paraphrased.

²¹⁹ Matt. 15:23 ESV.

context and overfamiliar with the stories can cause Christians to miss Jesus' use of humor. Pastors tend to project the solemnity of sin and the cross onto Jesus' life and countenance. Yet Jesus played with metaphors, and he was playful with people. In the case study from Matthew, he used wit, irony, sarcasm, and even a whiff of bathroom humor. As Friedman often said, "Playfulness can get you out of a rut more successfully than seriousness."²²⁰ As a preacher, teacher, and (wounded) healer, Jesus modeled effective leadership in ministry and in the face of adversity. Effective leadership capitalizes on the vital tool of comedy.

With a new perception of pastoral suffering and the example of Jesus' perceptive genius, we are ready to open the toolbox and get into the mechanics of Churchcraft.

Reflection Questions: In what ways do you relate to the daily challenges Jesus faced in his ministry? How does this reading of Matthew change your perception of Jesus?

²²⁰ Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), xiii.

APPENDIX B:

CHURCHCRAFT APPRENTICESHIP AND ADVANCE EXPERIENCE

The Churchcraft Apprenticeship and Advance Experience is modeled after the Portland Seminary DMin program. This nine-month apprenticeship commences with a four-day Advance; followed by assigned readings, asynchronous online chats (a-chats), and weekly one-hour group video calls with their mentor: the entire program concludes with a thirteen-day life-changing tour of the Holy Land led by their mentor and a local Israeli guide. Time frames correspond with the school year.

Marketing and recruitment begin with the UMC Oklahoma Conference, Wesleyan Covenant Association, Asbury Theological Seminary, and local connections; however, publication of the book could generate further interest. The goal is to form four cohorts of twelve to fifteen pastors per year. This Advance model may expand to include more mentors and more cohorts. Because of the investment in each participant, the program includes an application, interview, and placement process. An initial deposit of \$500 is required at the time of acceptance to the program. Total cost for the program is \$7,500 which includes the Holy Land Advance. We will apply for grants, and solicit private donors so that we can offer need-based scholarships.

The first Advance provides orientation; setting expectations and allowing participants to become acquainted with their mentors, their docents, and each other. Participants will register for the Holy Land Advance, and make the \$500 trip deposit (payable to the travel agent). This Advance convenes from Tuesday to Friday (solo pastors do not miss a Sunday) in Tulsa, OK. Participants arrive at Tulsa International Airport by Tuesday afternoon and transfer to their accommodations at Aloft Hotel which

is within walking distance of the facility. The group will gather for orientation and dinner at Asbury UMC at 6pm. Wednesday and Thursday follow the same basic pattern of shared meals, morning and afternoon sessions with mentors, a group activity and dinner at a local restaurant. Friday morning after breakfast the participants will share a final “reflections” session followed by an intimate worship service with communion. The first Advance concludes by 10:30 am. Participants will check out of the hotel by noon and transfer back to the airport. The Advance will utilize classrooms at Asbury Theological Seminary’s satellite campus. Except for two dinners, all meals are taken together on-site. Before the Advance an initial cost of \$1,800 is due, which covers the nine-month mentorship and Tulsa Advance (including hotel and all meals but not transportation).

After the Tulsa Advance cohorts engage in weekly reading assignments and a one-hour group video call. The on-line chat forum allows participants to process the readings. The time commitment is approximately six hours per week. The purpose of the weekly readings, a-chats, and one-hour video calls is twofold: first, to facilitate mentoring in the art of Churchcraft by a seasoned pastor (the curriculum for mentorship is based on the Churchcraft book series, but the specifics will be determined by the mentor and the needs of the cohort); second, to help the cohort form supportive peer relationships, providing a forum in which to process ministry together.

The reading assignments, a-chats, and video calls begin Monday following the Tulsa Advance and continue for nine months, breaking for Christmas and Holy week. The final weeks focus on preparing the cohorts for the second Advance Experience: a guided tour of the Holy Land. The Churchcraft Apprenticeship team will lead two Holy Land Advances per year with two cohorts each (participants may bring a spouse or guest

for an additional cost). The Holy Land Advance (\$5,200) can be paid in four installments over nine months. The cost includes transportation, accommodations, gratuities, insurance, most meals and all entrance fees. Apprentices are encouraged to find sponsors at their home church to invest in their continuing education and spiritual growth—both financially and with prayer. Although it can vary from year to year, a sample itinerary of the Holy Land Advance is as follows²²¹:

DAY 1 (Mon.): FLIGHT

We leave for a journey to the land where you will gain a new connection and understanding of the Bible. Walk, see, feel, taste, and touch the roots of the Christian faith and encounter the presence of God.

DAY 2 (Tue.): JOPPA – TEL AVIV – NETANYA

Upon arrival at the **TEL AVIV** Ben Gurion airport, our guide, **Yoav** (*Yo-ahv*), and driver take us to **Joppa** (*Jaffa*) for a short visit. We view the ancient port location from which Jonah tried to flee (Jonah 1). Peter was at the home of Simon the tanner here (Acts 9). Acts 10 describes Peter's relationship with a Roman centurion, the gentile Cornelius. Acts 10 is a major shift for Peter's understanding of his faith as a disciple of Jesus. We see **Tel-Aviv**, before driving to our hotel at Netanya, located on the beautiful shores of the **Mediterranean**. We have a wonderful buffet dinner and a good night's rest.

DAY 3 (Wed.): COASTAL PLAIN

After a superb Israeli breakfast buffet, we begin our tour at **Caesarea**, city of Cornelius the centurion, the first Gentile convert (Acts 10). We visit the Roman theater, walk on the pier used by the apostle Paul on his way to Rome and see the impressive water aqueduct built by Herod the Great. After a **falafel meal** at a Druze village, we head to the **Jezreel Valley**. At **Megiddo**, we view the excavations of 21 superimposed cities, the remains from Solomon's days (1 Kings 9). We stop at **Mt. of Precipice** (Luke 4) for a wondrous view of Nazareth and then drive through the small town ("Can anything good come from Nazareth?") where Jesus spent most of his life. We drive by **Cana of Galilee** where Jesus performed his first miracle at the wedding feast (John 2). Then we drive east to Tiberias and to our hotel where we stay for three nights.

DAY 4 (Thu.): AREA OF THE TRIBE OF DAN

We begin our day with a spectacular view from the east side of the Sea of Galilee at the "**Peace Overlook**." Following the accounts of Luke 9, we drive through the **Hula Valley** to reach **Har Ben Tal**, a military post overlooking Lebanon and

²²¹ This itinerary was generated by the travel agency, Journeys Unlimited, but has been modified by the author and the lead mentor.

Syria. We gain a better understanding of the current Israeli security dilemma. **Mt. Hermon** (Psalm 133) is before us. The **Road to Damascus**, where Saul encountered the risen Christ (Acts 9), is in this region. We visit **Banias**, one of the headwaters of the **Jordan River** and site of **Caesarea Philippi**—Peter's great confession (Matthew 16). We walk through the beautiful **Dan Nature Reserve**. At the end of our walk we will see the foundations of Jeroboam's altar (1 Kings 12) and see a city gate from the time of Abraham. Today ends with a fun **rafting trip** down the **Jordan River**.

DAY 5 (Fri.): AROUND THE SEA OF GALILEE

We sail this morning on the **Sea of Galilee** and can visualize Jesus' numerous experiences with his disciples in this region. Disembarking, we see a film telling of an incredible archaeological find in 1986—the **Ancient Fishermen's Boat** from Jesus' time. We visit the **Mount of Beatitudes**. Christ preached his "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7) from this area. We go to a restaurant where you can order "St. Peter's fish" for lunch. We visit the town of **Capernaum**, Jesus' ministry headquarters. He taught in the synagogue and spent much of his ministry here (Matthew 4). We end our day visiting the site of the 2009 discovery of the **Magdala Synagogue**. Here we recall the tremendous impact women had upon Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

DAY 6 (Sat.): JORDAN VALLEY

We leave the Galilee and descend through the **Jordan Valley**. We ride up the hill to see the breathtaking and panoramic view of the Jordan Valley at the **Belvoir Crusader Castle**. We travel to see a fascinating mosaic floor at the **Beit Alpha Synagogue**. It depicts the Ark of the Covenant, the Zodiac and the Binding of Isaac. We travel south near the Jordan River, pass to the east of Jericho to see the traditional site where John baptized Jesus (Matthew 3:13). We see **Qumran**, site of the 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We conclude our longest travel day with a nice ride to our beautiful hotel at the **Dead Sea**, located in the lowest place in the world, 1300 feet below sea level!

DAY 7 (Sun.): DEAD SEA AREA

We ride a cable car to the mountain fortress of **Masada**. This is another of Herod's magnificent fortresses and the site of the Zealots' stand against Rome. We see the well-preserved storehouses, cisterns and palaces here. We visit **En Gedi** and understand in a new way some passages from the Bible (Psalm 42). After a short hike, we reach the waterfall where David cut off part of Saul's robe (1 Samuel 24). The afternoon is a free day. Pay attention to the precautions about swimming in the Dead Sea. Those who wish will be able to enjoy the hotel's spa as well.

DAY 8 (Mon.): WILDERNESS OF JUDEA – JERUSALEM

Leaving the Dead Sea behind us, we will drive a portion of the **Old Jericho Road** used by pilgrims to ascend to Jerusalem in Jesus' days. As we make a stop along the desolated road we learn the meaning of Psalm 121 and better understand the story of

the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). We travel up to Jerusalem and make our first stop at the **Mt. of Olives**. We walk down the steep **Palm Sunday Road** past the **Garden of Gethsemane**, site of Jesus' betrayal (Luke 22) to the **Church of All Nations**. We visit the **Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu**. Here we experience the meaning of being put into a pit (Psalm 88). This could have been Caiaphas' house where Jesus may have been brought during his trial. This may have been the site of Peter's denial (Luke 22). An ancient Roman road is visible outside the church here.

DAY 9 (Tue.): BETHLEHEM – ISRAEL MUSEUM

An Arab guide leads us as we visit **Herodian**, another King Herod palace (and also his burial place). In **Bethlehem** we are in the birthplace of Naomi (Ruth 1), David (1 Samuel 16) and Jesus. We make a short visit to the **Church of Nativity**, the traditional site of Jesus' birth. Jerome also translated the Greek Bible into Latin here (called the Vulgate). We see the **Shepherds' Fields**, where David raised his sheep and where the good news of Jesus' birth was shared (Luke 2). We will have a shopping opportunity at Three Arches, enjoy a fine Arab meal, and return to Jerusalem. We visit the **Model of Jerusalem** at the **Israel Museum** to gain a perspective of the city at its apex in AD 66. This is where the **Shrine of the Book** ("the Dead Sea Scrolls") are housed. Tonight, a memorable event awaits us, as we view the spectacular light and sound show at the **Tower of David**, telling the story of Jerusalem through the centuries.

DAY 10 (Wed.): CITY OF DAVID – JUDEAN WILDERNESS

We spend the morning at the **City of David**, **Hezekiah's Tunnel** and the **Pool of Siloam**, where Jesus healed the blind man (John 9). After lunch at an Israeli shopping mall, our afternoon is a Jeep tour of the **Judean Wilderness**. This acquaints us with the Bedouin life and the importance of water for a nomadic lifestyle (i.e. Genesis 24). We also stand atop the place where the Scapegoat (*Azazel*) was released on the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* in Hebrew (Leviticus 16).

DAY 11 (Thu.): TEMPLE MOUNT – JEWISH QUARTER – NEW JERUSALEM

We go to the **Temple Mount** to see the **El Aqsa Mosque** and the **Dome of the Rock** shrine. You can pray at the **Western Wall** (Wailing Wall) and will probably see some Bar and Bet Mitzvahs at this sacred site to Jewish people. We walk through the **Arab Market** and bazaar and see the **Cardo** and **Hezekiah's Wall**. We continue to the **Jewish Quarter** and visit the extensive area uncovered by archaeologists, including the **Burnt House** at the time of Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans in AD 70. We visit the impressive **Western Wall Tunnel**, running along the continuation of the Western Wall, to get a better understanding of how the impressive complex of the Temple Mount was constructed. We leave the Old City in the afternoon to visit the Holocaust museum, **Yad Vashem**. This is a powerful reminder of the consequences of anti-Semitism.

DAY 12 (Fri.): JERUSALEM'S CHRISTIAN SITES – FREE AFTERNOON

After a visit to a site referred to as **The Upper Room** (Acts 2) we see the **Pool of Bethesda**, where Jesus healed a lame man (John 5). The acoustics at **St. Anne's**

Church will give us an opportunity be a choir. We view the remains of the **Antonia Fortress**, possibly the site of Jesus' trial (Matthew 27). We follow part of the **Via Doloroso** (Way of the Cross) to the **Church of the Holy Sepulcher** (the traditional site of Jesus' death and resurrection). Finally, we visit the **Garden Tomb (Gordon's Calvary)** and end with a communion service. We return to our hotel, pack, bring our luggage to the bus, have dinner and drive back to the Tel Aviv airport for a midnight flight back home.

DAY 13 (Sat.): FLIGHT

We have a long flight home, but it is conducive to sleep. You will return with wonderful memories, deeper friendships, a broadened understanding of history, the Bible, and a deeper experience of faith.

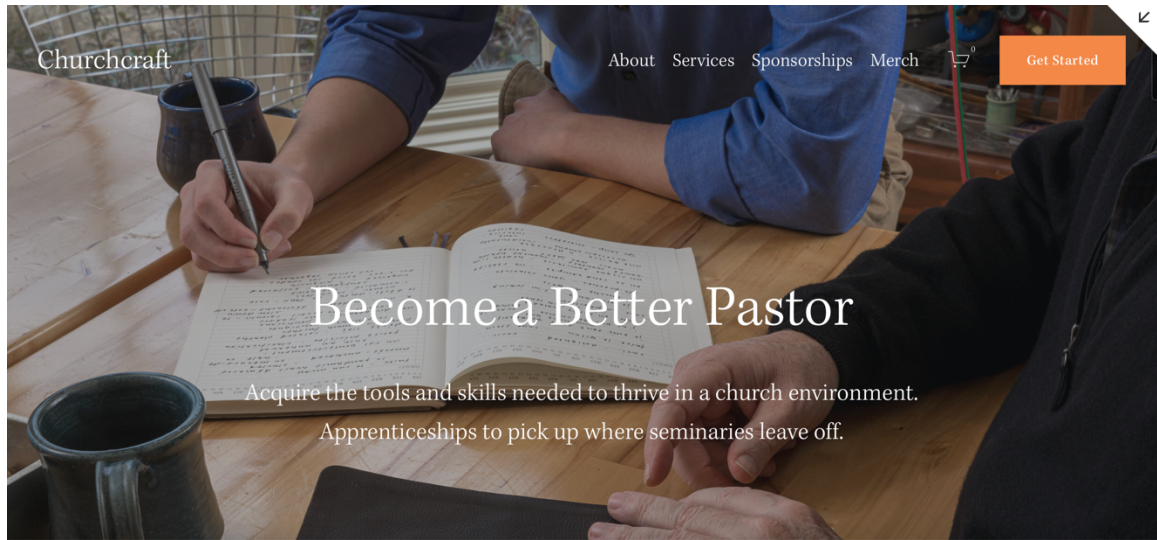
INCLUDES: Round-trip Airfare from Tulsa (or other city), round-trip transfers between airport and hotels, hotel accommodations, ten-day tour of Israel with guide, daily breakfast and dinner, 3 lunches (falafel, fish and Bethlehem), medical coverage while in Israel, all entrance fees including Tower of David. All hotel taxes, current airport taxes (subject to change until ticketed), all gratuities, document case with luggage tags, personalized name badge with lanyard.

HOTELS: One night West Lagoon, Netanya; three nights U Boutique Kinneret, Tiberias; two nights Isrotel, Dead Sea; five nights Inbal, Jerusalem

PRICE: Per person is \$5,150.00 (actual cost), based on double occupancy at quality hotels. Price is based on a minimum of 36 passengers on the bus. Single supplement is an additional \$1,530.00 (limited availability).

The lead mentor believes seeing the Holy Land in person is a “must” for any preaching pastor. Visiting the Holy Land makes the Bible come alive. After being in the land where Jesus walked, a pastor will not read scripture or preach a sermon the same way again. Along with helping the pastor in her faith and ministry, the Holy Land Advance is a powerful bonding agent that will solidify lasting peer relationships. Three months after the final Advance, we will convene a final video-call celebration to reflect on the experience and share stories.

The Churchcraft website is in process, but here is a sampling: landing page, “About” page, “Services” page, “Sponsorships” page, and “Merch” page, in which we will offer Churchcraft brand books and playful merchandise.



Tools of the Trade

Your mentors know from experience how challenging pastoral ministry can be. They have spent decades developing the soft skills and tools of the trade necessary to navigate a church environment with greater success. Like you, they share a passion for helping others follow Jesus. Together, we will make a great team.



Axiom #1

Lower Your Expectations

Raise Your Commitment

— Dr. Tom Harrison

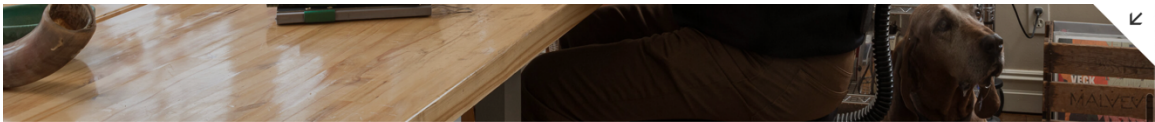


Meet Your Mentor

Your mentors have “been there, done that.” Learn from their experience.
Let them help you become the best pastor you can be.

[Get Started](#)

Why Hermeneutics and Homiletics Aren't Enough



Seminaries are expert in teaching students sound theological doctrine and the hard skills required to answer a call to ministry. However, many pastors are woefully unprepared for how difficult ministry can be. Surveys among pastors show:

- 80 percent report **feeling unqualified** or **discouraged** in their role of pastor at least one or more times in their ministry.
- 70 percent report they have a **lower self-image** now than when they first started.

Statistics also indicate the early years are critical:

- 1 out of 3 **felt totally burned-out** within the first five years.
- 35-40 percent **leave** the ministry **within five years**.
- 60-80 percent **leave** the ministry **within ten years**.

Many simply have not developed the soft skills necessary to succeed:

- 53 percent report **seminary did not adequately prepare them**.
- 90 percent feel they were **not trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation**.

Pastors may view their divine calling as quid pro quo assurance against personal suffering. Yet, everyone suffers. Seminaries train pastors with the hard skills of technical and practical knowledge required for ministry, but hermeneutics and homiletics do not help a pastor who is wounded. We have learned this the hard way.



Pastors must have skills in biblical exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics in relation to preaching, teaching and disciple-making but being a successful pastor depends much more on having soft skills.

Churchcraft comprises the soft skills, experiential knowledge, and navigational tools a leader needs to thrive in a church environment.

Churchcraft involves competencies that are unique to ministry but not part of the normal preparation for ministry. Soft skills are primarily about relating to and working well with others. They include a combination of social and emotional intelligence quotients, people skills, communication skills, and positive flexible attitudes (among other things). Soft skills are subjective competencies that are essential to a pastor's longevity in ministry.

Our mentors want to use their years of experience to help

Our mentors want to use their years of experience to help pastors develop skill sets that are unique to ministry but are not part of the standard preparation for ministry. We are picking up where seminaries leave off. We are coming alongside pastors to help them thrive.

This is Churchcraft.

Become the Best Pastor You Can Be.

Apprenticeship cohorts now forming for Fall 2021.

Churchcraft

[About](#)

[Services](#)

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[Get Started](#)

Our Experience is at Your Service

Ideally, Churchcraft is conveyed elbow to elbow from a seasoned pastor to a younger pastor as they work alongside one another (through example, observation and feedback).

Since mentors are not always available, we have an apprenticeship program to help guide you into becoming the best pastor you can be.

Apprenticeship and Advance Experience

The Churchcraft Apprenticeship and Advance Experience is a nine-month apprenticeship that commences with a four-day Advance in Tulsa, Oklahoma; followed by assigned readings, asynchronous online chats (a-chats), and weekly one-hour video calls with your mentor and cohort; it concludes with a thirteen-day life-changing tour of the Holy Land led by your mentor and a local Jewish guide. Time frames for the cohorts are September through May and October through June (two cohorts per term).

Five Tools to Become a Better Pastor

[Download the free PDF.](#)

Soft skills vs. Hard Skills in Ministry

[Download the free PDF.](#)

One-on-One Coaching

Five Things You Didn't Learn in Seminary (but you still need to know)

[Download the free PDF.](#)

When a Calling Isn't Enough

The good news is: You are called. The bad news is: A calling isn't enough. Contact us to see how we can partner to help you become the best pastor you can be.

Invest in Your Pastor

You can help fund your pastor's Apprenticeship and Advance Experience by giving to their account or by making a general donation to help sponsor a pastor in need. 100% of contributions go toward the program costs and are tax-deductible. Designated donations will generate an e-card to notify the pastor.

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Go ahead, have some fun.

Differentiation is an important tool for thriving in a church environment. One mentor says about pastoring, "Ninety-five percent of the people are wonderful, but *oh the five percent*." Take this cup to your stuffy staff meetings and contentious committee meetings. Keep it handy when a cranky congregant comes a calling. Every time you sip your dark roast or rooibos you can think to yourself, "*oh the 5 percent*"... and smile.

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY

Churchcraft. The craft of thriving as a leader in a church environment and acquiring of navigational tools, experiential knowledge, and soft skills to do so.

cognitive dissonance. Inconsistency between beliefs and corresponding behaviors.

comedy. A dramatic device from Greek antiquity that demonstrates ways to respond to life's problems—characterized by happy endings in which all is reconciled.

comic spirit. An attitude that adopts a sense of humor about the tragic sense of life.

Faith Movement. A message promoting healing and material blessing presently available through the past actions of Jesus and which are activated by a person's faith.

Feast of Fools. Medieval European festival in which lower classes mocked clergy and religious rituals.

hard skills. The ability to tackle job-specific duties and responsibilities; job related objective competencies.

incongruity. The difference between what is expected and what is reality.

ironic literalism. A mockery that is actually true.

liminal. The threshold of a status (life) change that causes disorientation.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. A belief among some Evangelicals that God simply wants people to be good and feel happy.

nudge. A move to awaken one another to the God who is already present and to what he is already doing. Necessarily implies human contact and some level of proximity.

parodic exaltation. The mockery of a lowly slave or criminal who acts 'above his rank' by pretending to worship him and treat him as a king.

pastoral care. The process of guiding people through their life's journey and in their search for meaningful existence.

perception. The way a person interprets sensory information and responds to it; meaning assigned to a given stimulus (person, situation, or thing) which is influenced by one's experiences and beliefs.

perceptive. The ability "to look through." To see what others miss; to have insight.

perspective. One's attitude toward a thing; a person's point of view.

prosperity gospel. A common way of referring to the Faith Movement's message.

resilience. The ability to adapt well in the face of adversity.

(re)sign. The process of assigning new meaning to an experience with an emphasis on the influence of Christ and culture.

RQ or resiliency intelligence quotient. Aptitudes and attitudes that contribute to resiliency.

scripture. God's self-disclosure through the canonical 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament.

soft skills. The ability to relate to and work well with others. Soft skills include a combination of social and emotional intelligence quotients, people skills, communication skills, and positive flexible attitudes (among other things).

suffering. Distress experienced by some kind of loss.

theology of suffering. Developed religious beliefs about the reality and inevitability of suffering, especially as it relates to Christianity.

tacit knowledge. Intuitive knowledge plus soft skills practiced over time.

tragedy. A dramatic device from Greek antiquity showing a conflict with no resolution—the result of a character's hubris or some other fatal flaw; ends in death.

triangulation. A relational situation in which two people in conflict draw in a third person to facilitate communication and allow for the original two to avoid dealing with one another directly.

winsome wounds. Wounds that develop an attractive quality of character because of the good that comes from them. Suffering that is redeemed or in the process of being redeemed.

wound. A loss of integrity or wholeness that impairs a person's ability to function.

wounded healer. A minister who must tend to his own wounds and also the wounds of others.

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