

3-1-2009

Sustaining Spiritual Leadership for the Long Haul: The Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College

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Recommended Citation

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE LONG HAUL:
THE CENTER FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AT BARCLAY COLLEGE

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

BY
DAVID O. WILLIAMS

NEWBERG, OREGON

MARCH 2009

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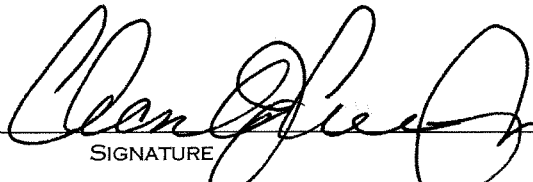
DAVID O. WILLIAMS


DATE: MARCH 6, 2009

TITLE:

**SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE LONG HAUL:
THE CENTER FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AT BARCLAY COLLEGE**

**WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION DEGREE**


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I pause to reflect upon the process that has led to the completion of this particular project, I find myself overwhelmed yet again by the grace and mercy of our great and mighty God. I have been immersed in his passionate, relentless, boundless love since the day I was born, but I continue to be amazed by the fresh expressions of love that he reveals to me on a regular basis. It is by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ alone that I have been saved and set apart for service as a minister of the gospel. I humbly offer this project as a “living sacrifice,” an imperfect yet heartfelt expression of my love and gratitude to God. I pray that it will be holy, pleasing and acceptable in his sight. “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

By his grace, the Lord has seen fit to shower me with many extraordinary gifts over the years. Next to Jesus, however, there is none greater than the gift of my family. My parents, John and Gerry Williams, have always loved me, supported me, believed in me and prayed for me. In fact, their encouragement served as the catalyst for this doctoral venture. Throughout their 65 years of marriage and ministry together, they have set the “gold standard” for faithfulness to Christ and his church, and I will always be eternally grateful for their influence upon my life.

I was not sure that I would ever be able to find anyone who would be able to match their level of devotion to God and compassion for his people. Then the Lord introduced me to a woman named Carol. Having recently celebrated 25 years of marriage and ministry ourselves, I can say without hesitation that my parents have met their match! Without her constant encouragement and the sacrificial support of our six

beautiful children and their spouses – Josiah and Shelby, Sarah and Gabe, Jeremiah, Hannah, Jessie and Jasmine – I would have given up on this project a long time ago. Thanks for bearing with me, you guys. I owe you ... big time!

I also want to express my deep appreciation for the “great cloud of witnesses” that has surrounded me throughout this particular phase in my journey with Jesus. I could never have embarked on an adventure like this without the inspiration and encouragement of the faculty and administration at Barclay College. My destination is now in sight due in great part to their very tangible and unwavering support. I am also deeply grateful for my friends at Quaker Ridge Camp, who graciously provided me with an ideal setting where I could complete the bulk of this dissertation. Then there are all of my fellow students, professors and spiritual directors from Cohorts H and I in the DMin program at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. Each one of you has made a significant contribution to my own personal and professional formation, and has helped to shape the essential character and content of this project in particular. Special thanks goes to the “Beach Fathers” (Mike, Chuck, Cranston, Jeff and Fil), and to my advisors, Chuck Conniry and Dick Sartwell. You may not all be Quakers, but I count you all as true friends!

Finally, I want to dedicate this project to the current students and recent graduates from Barclay College. You are the very reason it exists. I have no higher privilege than to know you, serve you, learn from you and partner with you in the ministry of the gospel. And I have no greater passion than to help you sustain effective, lifelong ministry in and through the body of Christ. It is my hope and prayer that this project will bear meaningful fruit in your lives, serving as a source of encouragement for those of you who may be growing weary from the battle, and a catalyst for restoration and renewal for

those of you who have been tempted to lose heart and give up along the way. With the saints through the ages, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Let us consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that we will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:2-3).

PREFACE

sus-tain, v. [Etymology: Middle English *sustenēn*, from Anglo-French *sustēin-*, stem of *sustenir*, from Latin *sustinēre* to hold up, sustain, from *sub-*, *sus-* up + *tenēre* to hold] 1: to give support or relief to; 2: to supply with sustenance: NOURISH; 3: KEEP UP, PROLONG; 4: to support the weight of: PROP; *also*: to carry or withstand (a weight or pressure); 5: to buoy up <*sustained* by hope> 6a: to bear up under, b: SUFFER, UNDERGO <*sustained* heavy losses> 7a: to support as true, legal, or just, b: to allow or admit as valid <the court *sustained* the motion> 8: to support by adequate proof: CONFIRM <testimony that *sustains* our contention>¹

Sustainability is a hot topic these days. With a new energy crisis on our hands, and the ominous impact of global warming looming large on the environmental horizon, everyone is talking about the importance of investing in renewable resources. To be sustainable, the experts tell us, nature's resources must only be used at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally. From a purely ecological perspective, failure to sustain the health and vitality of these natural resources is tantamount to writing ourselves a guaranteed prescription for death and destruction.

For those who have been called to serve in the increasingly fragile environment of church leadership, the parallels could not be more obvious. The cost of ministry is on the rise these days, and a disaster is looming on the horizon. For the first time in recent memory, more people are currently leaving vocational, church-based ministry than are entering it.² Or to put it in another way, we are using up our spiritual leaders faster than we are replenishing them. If we do not find ways to help sustain the health and vitality of these men and women of God, we will not only witness even greater levels of burnout

¹ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. "Sustain," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustain> (accessed October 28, 2008).

² Patricia M.Y. Chang, "Assessing the Clergy Supply in the 21st Century," *Pulpit and Pew* (2004): 11, <http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/ClergySupply.pdf> (accessed January 12, 2009).

and breakdown among our church leaders, but we will soon find ourselves in the midst of a spiritual disaster that could threaten to undermine the very viability of the American church itself as a redemptive influence in our emerging culture.

So is there any hope for transforming the charred landscape created by clergy burnout? Is sustainability a realistic expectation in such a harsh ecclesiastical environment? Those of us at Barclay College who are called and committed to the ministry of spiritual renewal need look no further than our own backyard for the answers. Located just ten miles west of Haviland, Kansas (Barclay's hometown) is the city of Greensburg, our county seat. On May 4, 2007, Greensburg was virtually wiped off the map by a monstrous EF5 tornado, with sustained winds of over 200 miles per hour. In a matter of minutes, at least 90% of the town was destroyed or seriously damaged. Houses were leveled to their foundations. Trees were stripped bare and converted into giant Popsicle sticks. Pickup trucks were tossed across the street like Matchbox cars.

Anyone who surveyed the damage left behind by the Greensburg tornado, one of the most violent storms in American history, would have been tempted to give up any hope for rebuilding. For many, it would have seemed easier to clear the rubble and move on. And yet, if those same people were to visit Greensburg today, they might be surprised at what they find. Residents are gradually returning. Homes, businesses, schools and hospitals are being rebuilt. Hope is being restored. Slowly but surely, Greensburg is making a comeback. In fact, this little town on the Great Plains is being designed as a model community for, you guessed it, sustainability. The town even has its own television series on the Planet Green cable network. What is more, the city council recently approved a proposal that made Greensburg the first city in the United States to

require all of its new municipal construction projects to be “LEED Platinum Certified.” Greensburg is finally going “green!”

I believe there is a valuable lesson on leadership in this story, a modern day parable of the kingdom “for those who have ears to hear” (Mt 11:15). Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus demonstrated beyond any shadow of a doubt that our God is the Lord of resurrection and renewal. If he can rebuild a devastated community into an emerging model of economic and environmental vitality, is there any reason why he cannot restore hope to the body of Christ by renewing the health and vitality of her spiritual leaders? If he sees fit to provide the resources for sustaining a remote, agricultural outpost on the Kansas prairie, would he spare any expense when it comes to sustaining the lives and ministries of those who have been called to serve as shepherds of his flock?

When we watch pastors and other spiritual leaders collapse under the overwhelming stress and strain of public ministry, will we be content to “clear the rubble and move on,” casting our broken brothers and sisters aside while we search hastily for more attractive, less damaged replacements? Will we, like the pious priest and law-abiding Levite in another of Jesus’ parables (Lk 10:25-37) callously “pass by on the other side” of these wounded healers? Or will we, like the Good Samaritan, be moved with compassion to bind their wounds, care for their needs, and invest personally in their long-term recovery and restoration? If this is not at the very heart of the gospel, then tell me – what is? Let the rebuilding begin.

*“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to **prepare** [Gk, καταρτιζο; to **mend or restore**] God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”*
- Ephesians 4:11-12 (emphasis mine)

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ABSTRACT

There is no higher calling in the Christian life than the call to serve as a spiritual leader within the body of Christ (pastor, music minister, missionary, etc.). While many of these leaders are functioning quite well in their respective ministries today, many others are leaving vocational ministry at an alarming rate. In section one of this document, an attempt will be made to identify some of the key factors that contribute to this current clergy crisis.

A significant number of support services have emerged in recent years in an attempt to address the problem of clergy burnout. Section two will provide a brief overview of these existing resources, an honest appraisal of their value in reducing the impact of clergy burnout, and careful consideration of potential opportunities for forging ongoing partnerships.

Section three will offer a theoretical framework for specific proposals designed to reverse this pattern of premature departure from public ministry, supported by evidence gleaned from a variety of academic disciplines. It is the thesis of this author that providing opportunities for spiritual leaders to experience personal and professional renewal, in the context of a supportive Christian community, will reduce the impact of burnout and help these men and women sustain effective, lifelong ministry in and through the body of Christ.

In section four, a modest proposal is presented for alleviating the impact of burnout among spiritual leaders through the development of a Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College. The specific details of this project are outlined in section five, including a description of the project's target audience, goals, strategies and budget,

as well as considerations for the ongoing maintenance, promotion and evaluation of such a program. The sixth and final section of this document provides an opportunity for reflection and assessment following the initial implementation of the project and offers suggestions for further research and development.

SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM

There is no greater privilege in the Christian life than to serve as a spiritual leader within the body of Christ. As the Apostle Paul testifies, “If a man is eager to be a church leader, he desires an excellent work” (1 Tim 3:1, TEV). While many of these leaders are functioning quite well in their respective ministries today, the number of men and women who have been leaving vocational ministry in recent years has reached a disturbing level.¹ Unless these leaders are restored to their appointed place of service how can they, like Paul, say with confidence at the end of the day, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7)? Moreover, how can the body of Christ be built up and fully equipped for the work of ministry, “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,” unless “each part does its work” (Eph 4:11-16)? In section one of this document, an attempt will be made to address these critical questions by identifying the key factors that contribute to the premature departure of spiritual leaders from their God-given ministries.

Statistical Data

Those who are set apart for spiritual leadership in the body of Christ have received a high calling indeed. According to recent studies, they are also in for one rough ride:

¹ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, “Experiences of Protestant Ministers Who Left Local Church Ministry” (presented to the Religious Research Association, Norfolk, VA, October 25, 2003), 1. According to the authors, “The best data comes from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, where 15% of the newly ordained in 1988 left the roster of clergy (which includes both local church ministers and specialized ministers) in the subsequent thirteen years. The percentage leaving *local church ministry* was probably higher.”

- Of the 500,000 full-time, vocational pastors in the United States today, approximately one out of every four (125,000) are experiencing “burnout”²
- 60% work more than 60 hours per week
- 80% believe that ministry has adversely affected their families
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month
- 37% confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church (which is about the same percentage as the general population)
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend
- 70% have a lower self-image than when they entered ministry
- 70% say they get less than seven hours of sleep each night
- 75% do not take a regular day off for Sabbath rest
- 76% are overweight or obese (compared with 61% of the general population)³
- 40% reported being depressed or worn out “some or most of the time”
- Not surprisingly, 40% of these pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone⁴
- Tragically, 1,500 pastors actually do leave public ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout or contention in their churches⁵

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

² Frank Green, class notes, *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 24, 2006 [first ten items]. This data, initially reported in a study conducted by Fuller Theological Seminary in 1995, has been repeatedly corroborated by subsequent studies in more recent years (see Hoge and Wenger, 2003).

³ Bob Wells, “Which Way to Clergy Health?” *Divinity* (Fall 2002): 2 [items eleven and twelve]. <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/docs/Magazine/DivmagFall2002.pdf> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁴ H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 25. As the vice president of ministry outreach/pastoral ministries for Focus on the Family, London is uniquely qualified to assess the concerns of pastors and their families based on over 30 years of personal experience and regular contact with thousands of pastors from across the country.

⁵ Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, *Extreme Church Makeover* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 12.

Case Studies

For those of us who work directly with a new generation of emerging Christian leaders, the implications of this clergy crisis go far beyond statistics. These numbers have names. The following excerpt, taken from a letter written by a recent Barclay College graduate, provides a poignant example of the current challenges facing young leaders today:

You may be wondering why I am pursuing a job outside of the church. I have felt for about two years that the organized church is not the church that we read of in the New Testament. When I was called into the ministry I simply assumed that it was supposed to be in the “church.” The churches I have been a part of are churches in name only but not in the actual biblical sense of the word. It is to a point where I can’t take it anymore and I have to do this. We go through the same religious motions every week and every week we slip further and further from God. Churches expect a pastor to be the lone representative of their church, and that isn’t biblical. I have looked over some of the things I have done under the guise of ministry, and realize that much of it was just busy work or was work that all believers should have been doing. What do you think?

This young pastor is obviously dealing with the combined effects of exhaustion, disillusionment and isolation as he does his best to care for himself and his family while caring for the small flock he has been called to serve in a small, remote town in rural America. His struggle is not unique, however, but represents a common experience for many of our emerging church leaders, as illustrated in this labored lament from another Barclay alumnus, a youth pastor on his first tour of duty in the local church:

January and February were really hard months ... I was experiencing some depression ... ministry was really difficult ... things were falling apart ... everything was going south ... I was really discouraged about it ... I did not have a clue what to do ... I felt like the life was seeping out of me ... nothing was exciting or funny or enjoyable to me ... I did not know what to do about this at all ... I was praying about it and asking God to show me what in the

world I was supposed to do, but with no answers ... I felt like trying to do what I was doing had somehow snuffed out who I used to be and how I used to minister ... inside and physically I felt like I was wasting away ... I was just in survival mode.

Like young soldiers returning from a foreign battlefield, emerging spiritual leaders like these are often shell-shocked when they discover that the local church can be a deadly war zone as well. And far too often, it seems, we tend to shoot our wounded. Most of us know someone like these two young men. They might be serving in your church right now or, more than likely, they may have recently left. They may be your friends, or they may be part of your own family. Again, numbers have names.

All of us are familiar with the high profile cases of prominent church leaders who have succumbed to the pitfalls and pressures of public ministry. Their names are strewn across the headlines much in the same way that the names of fallen soldiers are reported on the evening news, only with much less honor. In fact, as I pen these very words, I am on a writing retreat near Colorado Springs, the home of New Life Church. It was just two years ago that scandal once again rocked the church world as allegations came to light regarding the sexual conduct of one of its most prominent leaders. Ted Haggard eventually stepped down from his position as senior pastor of the 14,000-member New Life megachurch, and as the executive director of the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents more than 30 million evangelicals from across the country. In a letter written to the congregation he founded and served for over 20 years, Haggard acknowledged his immoral behavior and apologized for any damage it may have caused to the church and to his own family:

I am so sorry. I am sorry for the disappointment, the betrayal, and the hurt. I am sorry for the horrible example I have set for you. I have an overwhelming, all-consuming sadness in my heart for the pain that you and I and my family have experienced over the past few days. I am so sorry for the circumstances that have caused shame and embarrassment to all of you. The fact is, I am guilty of sexual immorality, and I take responsibility for the entire problem.

I am a deceiver and a liar. There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it all of my adult life. For extended periods of time, I would enjoy victory and rejoice in freedom. Then, from time to time, the dirt that I thought was gone would resurface, and I would find myself thinking thoughts and experiencing desires that were contrary to everything I believe and teach.

Through the years, I've sought assistance in a variety of ways, with none of them proving to be effective in me. Then, because of pride, I began deceiving those I love the most because I didn't want to hurt or disappoint them.

The public person I was wasn't a lie; it was just incomplete. When I stopped communicating about my problems, the darkness increased and finally dominated me. As a result, I did things that were contrary to everything I believe.⁶

Haggard's comments are troubling, to say the least. As we saw in the statements from our two Barclay grads, it is not unusual for spiritual leaders at any stage in ministry to find themselves in situations where, like Ted Haggard, they find themselves "thinking thoughts and experiencing desires" that are "contrary to everything" they believe and teach. What is especially revealing, though, is Haggard's confession that "I began deceiving those I love the most because I didn't want to hurt or disappoint them," and, "when I stopped communicating about my problems, the darkness increased and finally dominated me."

⁶ Ted Haggard, "Letter to New Life Church Family" (letter presented to New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO, November 5, 2006).

Core Issues

I believe each of these case studies contain within them a number of important clues that may help us to better understand the dynamics that produce such high levels of burnout and breakdown among spiritual leaders today, which so often leads to a premature departure from public ministry. But before we examine some of these core issues, we need to begin by defining the term “burnout” itself.

According to Merriam-Webster, burnout can be defined as “exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.”⁷ David Mann is certainly correct in his assertion that “the phenomenon of burnout was present long before Dr. Herbert Freudenberger coined the phrase in 1974 to describe behaviors he observed among staff members of human service agencies.”⁸ Working with people has always been draining, regardless of the setting.

So how might we explain the rise in the impact of burnout among church leaders in recent years? As United Methodist clergywoman and licensed social worker Sheri Ferguson suggests, “Today’s clergy seem to have greater demands and less support, and the radical changes in our society over the past 50 years have fundamentally redefined the very nature of what it means to be in ministry.”⁹ This sentiment is echoed by Gwen Halaas, a family physician in Kenosha, Wisconsin, who directs the Ministerial Health and Wellness Program for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). According to Halaas, a major study in the 1950’s began following

⁷ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. “Burnout,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/burnout> (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁸ David P. Mann, “Preventing Burnout in Ministry: A Health and Wellness Approach,” *Ashland Theological Journal* (2007): 49.

⁹ Sheri S. Ferguson, “Clergy Compassion Fatigue,” *Family Therapy* (March-April 2007): 16.

a large cohort of clergy. The researchers found that clergy had lower rates of disease for virtually every possible diagnosis and lived longer and healthier lives than any other professional group. The results were quite different, however, when similar studies were conducted on the generations of clergy that were to follow. A 1983 study, for example, found that Protestant clergy had the highest overall work-related stress of various religious professionals and the next-to-lowest amount of personal resources to cope with the strain. In 1999, another study found that clergy have one of the highest death rates from heart disease of any occupation. “Basically,” Halaas summarizes, “it’s become a more difficult job with fewer rewards, and all those things add to stress and take a toll on health.”¹⁰

One of the most comprehensive studies on the impact of clergy burnout was conducted in 2001 as part of the Pulpit and Pew Project at Duke Divinity School. Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, researchers from the Catholic University of America, were commissioned to gather new data on why so many ministers are leaving church ministry today. Respondents included nearly 1,000 former leaders from five major denominations who had left local church ministry within the past eight years.

When the results were tabulated and the dust began to settle, some clear patterns emerged. According to Hoge and Wenger, “the main factors pushing local church ministers away are organizational and interpersonal. These pushes have to do with conflict, feelings of being stymied, and isolation.”¹¹ The men and women in

¹⁰ Wells, 2-3.

¹¹ Hoge and Wenger, 15. These results were confirmed by our Barclay survey as well (see appendix).

this study repeatedly spoke of the need to find ways to reduce the amount of stress they were experiencing. The primary source of this stress arose from conflicts with the congregation, church staff or denominational officials. *Exhausted* by the constant time and energy required to manage these conflicts, leaving little time and energy to invest in the things they loved, these former leaders experienced increasing levels of dissatisfaction and *disillusionment* in their work. This, in turn, led to intensified feelings of loneliness and *isolation*, based on the fact that these leaders were in conflict with the very people who would normally serve as their primary support system (congregation, colleagues and denominational officials).*

And so the trap is set. All that is needed to spring this trap and initiate a major physical, emotional, or moral breakdown is a trigger event of some kind – a perceived failure at work, a painful crisis at home, or worse yet, a personal panic attack arising from the paralyzing fear that someone may actually find out that we are fully human after all:

Many of us do not consider church to be a safe place to deal with basic life issues, much less our degeneracy ... and if you're a leader at church, the stakes are even higher. You would rather lose an index finger than undergo the disgrace of having your church find out about your sordid private life ... church will only become a place of spiritual healing and transformation when we take the risk to make it the most dangerous place of all – a place where we can be fully, completely ourselves.¹²

¹² Charles J. Conniry, Jr., *Soaring in the Spirit: Rediscovering Mystery in the Christian Life* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2007), 25, 26, 34.

SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

As we move to this next section in the document, it might be helpful to pause and reflect for just a moment on the important distinctions between a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree program and a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree program such as this one. For example, it is generally understood that the central purpose of a PhD program is to study a specific topic related to one's chosen academic discipline, primarily through engaging in scholarly research, with a goal of making a new and original contribution to the field through the completion of a doctoral dissertation. The primary purpose of a DMin program, on the other hand, is to engage ministry professionals in the integration of their experience with new knowledge, research and reflection in the company of their peers. This process is intended to culminate with the design and completion of a doctoral project that addresses both the nature and practice of ministry. The goal of this project is not to offer a unique contribution to ministry in general, but to apply theological research skills to a significant real-world ministry problem.¹

This distinction is extremely significant because it has the potential to yield at least two valuable benefits. First and foremost, it helps those of us in vocational ministry to resist the temptation to cultivate a competitive spirit. As we will see, this is an all-too-common experience in church leadership circles today. When those of us in a DMin program realize that we are not expected to produce something bigger and better than our peers, with the constant critiques and inherent superiority that this engenders, it has a way of reducing the potential for developing academic arrogance and professional pride. And the second benefit follows naturally from the first. Namely, when we have been

¹ George Fox Evangelical Seminary, "Leadership and Spiritual Formation Project," <http://www.georgefox.edu/seminary/dmin/lst/index.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

relieved of the burden to constantly critique and compete with our peers, we are freed to complement and cooperate with one another instead.

With this in mind, we can now turn our attention to the wide range of solutions that have been proposed in recent years as a means of addressing the issues of clergy burnout and clergy care. Hopefully, we will do so with an eye towards finding ways to cooperate with existing ministries even as we offer fresh perspectives that may complement the good work that is already underway.

As we have seen, these issues are certainly not new topics of conversation in the church. The concept of burnout itself has been circulating within the helping professions for at least 30 years now. These issues did not receive serious attention in Christian circles, however, until the mid-1980's, when a number of prominent evangelical leaders – Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and Gordon MacDonald among them – experienced sudden and highly publicized departures from ministry. In the two decades that have followed, there has been a dramatic surge in the number and variety of support services available to help church leaders cope with the stress and strain of vocational ministry.

National Initiatives

A significant number of resources have emerged on the national level in recent years in an attempt to address the problem of clergy burnout. A short list of such initiatives might include the following:

- Focus on the Family's *Pastoral Outreach Program*, directed by H.B. London
- The *Clergy Renewal Program*, sponsored by the Lilly Foundation
- The *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* program at Duke Divinity School
- The wide range of resources offered by the Alban Institute
- The National Clergy Support Network's *PastorCare* program
- *ShepherdCare*, sponsored by the National Heritage Foundation

In addition to these higher profile organizations, there are a number of leaders affiliated with George Fox Evangelical Seminary who have founded ministries with a similar focus:

- *Charis*, a counseling and renewal ministry directed by Frank Green
- *Journey Resources*, a ministry of spiritual guidance and direction, founded and directed by Fil Anderson
- *Sustainable Faith*, which offers mentoring, spiritual friendship and a school of spiritual direction, under the leadership of David Nixon
- *Trans4m*, directed by Sam Rima, a catalyst for transformational leadership

Each of these ministries provide much-needed assistance and support for spiritual leaders from across the spectrum of denominational and parachurch backgrounds as they seek to remain faithful to Christ and his calling upon their lives. The strength of organizations like these lies in their ability to reach out across sectarian boundaries and to offer a wide range of resources based on the size of their staff and support base. As we will see, it is also easier for men and women who are in crisis to maintain a greater degree of privacy and anonymity when working with ministries like these, since they normally have little or no official affiliation with the leader's home church or denomination. This author's personal life and ministry, and the lives of many of his colleagues, have been deeply enriched through the influence of ministries such as these.

But when it comes to clergy support and renewal, bigger is not always better. Like the faithful patrons from *Cheers*, "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name." And this is only possible when you are in relationship with others from your own faith tradition or "tribe." Due to the limited scope of this particular project, our discussion of these denominational initiatives will be restricted to the author's current ministry context.

Denominational Initiatives

Among Evangelical Friends, the denomination with which Barclay College has been affiliated throughout its entire 92-year history, a limited number of resources have been readily available for church leaders who are at risk of experiencing burnout. These are typically limited to annual pastor's retreats and occasional contacts from a yearly meeting superintendent. This apparent shortage of clergy² support services may not necessarily reflect a lack of concern on the part of denominational leadership, however. As Hoge and Wenger point out, a large part of this problem may be directly attributed to the frequent and, to some extent, unavoidable tension that often exists between local church leaders and denominational officials:

In our interviews with former pastors we asked what recommendations they would like to make to their denominations. Pastors identified lack of support as a major difficulty in serving as a local church minister. The two most obvious sources of support are from denominational leaders or from other clergy. Pastors found it difficult to confide their problems in denominational leaders because they did not want to jeopardize future calls and promotions. They felt constrained in seeking support from other clergy because of the enormous competition that exists among them.³

As a recorded minister within the Evangelical Friends Church-Mid America (EFC-MA), this author is personally convinced that our current denominational leaders are deeply committed to the health and vitality of every church and church leader within

² Ironically, the term "clergy" is rarely used within Quaker circles. This is based on the testimony of early Friends such as George Fox, who believed so strongly in the priesthood of all believers that he frequently spoke out publicly against the questionable character and conduct of "hirelings" (paid, professional pastors and other church leaders) throughout his ministry in seventeenth century England. Author and professor Elton Trueblood, one of the most prominent Quaker leaders of the twentieth century, echoed Fox's concerns in his repeated appeals for the "abolishment of the laity." A careful reading of the New Testament would appear to support such efforts. It is interesting to note that many Quaker leaders actually do serve in paid, "professional" ministry today, believing that this frees them to devote their full attention to church leadership and development, while remaining fully committed to removing the barriers between "clergy" and "laity" by equipping *all* of God's people for the work of ministry.

³ Hoge and Wenger, 13-14.

this particular yearly meeting. The only barriers that may prevent them from demonstrating the full extent of their concern are the very same limitations that every local church leader faces as well: time, energy and expertise.

With this in mind, Barclay College entered into a partnership with EFC-MA in January of 2005 to help launch an Institute for Church Leadership Development, a certificate-based program designed to provide ongoing support and practical ministry training for local church leaders. The Institute operates under the administrative oversight of the yearly meeting, with the Barclay faculty carrying the bulk of the teaching load. This new initiative has been surprisingly successful during its first four years of operation, enjoying the enthusiastic support of local churches and active participation from hundreds of current and prospective church leaders. This would seem to provide a natural starting point for the development of additional support services that specifically target those leaders who are in special need of restoration and renewal.

Conversations are currently underway, in fact, to strengthen this church-college partnership even further. Campus leaders from Barclay College have been asked to explore the possibility of taking the lead in sponsoring regular retreats for pastors and other church leaders serving among EFC-MA. Based on Barclay's central location and strong ties with Evangelical Friends from across the country, this retreat ministry could eventually encompass a much wider audience as well. In May of 2009, some of the first fruit of this latest cooperative venture will be evident as Barclay's new Center for Spiritual Renewal will co-sponsor a "Pastor's Sabbath Retreat" at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado, in partnership with EFC-MA and Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting. As with the Institute, yearly meeting leaders will be handling the

administrative logistics and Barclay will be assuming responsibility for the on-site teaching and spiritual direction. This is a growing partnership that holds great promise for the future.

Local Initiatives

Based on more than 26 years of personal experience in pastoral ministry, it is this author's observation that finding and building support systems with other church leaders in a local community can be a very difficult and daunting process. The sad but true reality is that most pastors do not trust each other. Not only do they too often see themselves in competition with each other (see Hoge and Wenger's comments noted above), but they are rarely willing or able to invest the time necessary for building close, personal friendships with peers in their area.

Episcopal priests Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr serve as clinical and spiritual directors of the St. Barnabas Center, an inpatient treatment center serving church leaders from a wide variety of faith traditions. Together they have provided over 10,000 hours of group and individual spiritual direction and psychotherapy to over 300 clergy. Drawing on this vast storehouse of experience, Hands and Fehr address the issue of clergy support systems in their book, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy*:

Most clergy are relatively isolated, emotionally and spiritually, without enough *peer* support. They stand alone, as helpers to others, but are not appreciated or affirmed as equals ... participating in a genuine spiritual community as an equal is very important for a cleric's health and well-being ... clergy who recognize that they are relatively isolated need to take the initiative to find or create the kind of peer spiritual community in which they can live and grow.

It is crucial for clergy to develop and keep relationships that are personal, not professionally related. This means relationships in which they are not functioning in their role or professional responsibilities. Without such personal relationships, they are in danger of knowing only how to relate to others in their role ... the key

phrase for understanding the kind of relationships needed for health is *out of role and responsibility*.

Where to look for personal, out-of-role relationships? We believe they should be with peers – other adults. Some possibilities are those in allied helping professions and clergy and laity of other faith traditions. Friendships with such persons can have a more personal and trusting quality, and both parties can speak freely of their work pressures and concerns without fear of violations of confidences.⁴

Although such “peer friendship” may sound wonderful in theory, it is much harder to find this type of trusting, transparent community operating in the real world of market-driven ministry where today’s spiritual leaders live and move and have their being. As a general rule, most pastors and other church leaders have had very little experience with genuine intimacy in any context, including their relationships with God, themselves, and with their own families.⁵

Thankfully, the Kiowa County Ministerial Alliance (KCMA) provides a clear exception to this rule. As noted in the preface to this document, Barclay College is located in Haviland, Kansas, one of five small towns in Kiowa County, with Greensburg serving as the county seat. The county is currently home to fifteen churches representing thirteen different denominations, as well as the home office for Youth for Christ/South Central Kansas. The stated purposes for this ministerial alliance are posted on the KCMA website:

1. A Helping Hand to Lift the Needy: As an organization we provide financial help to the citizens of this community when they are in need.
2. A Loving Voice of Truth: As an alliance we take a unified stand on public issues within our community. We always stand for what we believe is in the best

⁴ Donald R. Hands, and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1993), 67-69.

⁵ Ibid., 8-14.

interest of the citizens and our community as a whole, based on a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture.

3. A Shoulder for Each Other: As an alliance we support one another. We celebrate each other's victories and hold each other up through the difficult times. We are unified in Christ and stand together.⁶

These core values were put to the test on May 4, 2007, when an EF5 Tornado tore through Greensburg, home to ten of the county's fifteen churches. The storm destroyed over 90% of the town, including each and every church building. These churches have been meeting in either temporary modules set up on their property or in facilities in neighboring towns until more permanent structures can be built. Pastors and churches from the communities surrounding Greensburg have taken significant roles in both the immediate relief efforts and in the ongoing recovery and rebuilding process. The level of personal care, interdenominational cooperation and community support that has been demonstrated by members of KCMA over the past eighteen months has been extraordinary. This came as no surprise to KCMA members, however. As one pastor has said, "Who you are before the storm determines who you are after the storm."

Each fall for the past seven years, members of KCMA have been invited to participate in a roundtable discussion on the Barclay College campus. This panel discussion is intended to provide current students with a personal glimpse into the world of local church leadership. It also provides a rare opportunity to ask honest questions about the blessings and challenges of working together across denominational boundaries for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom.

⁶ Kiowa County Ministerial Alliance, "Purpose of the Ministerial Alliance," <http://www.kcmaforchrist.org/home> (accessed October 30, 2008).

Long before the tornado hit, these local church and parachurch leaders spoke openly about the differences that existed among them, but they spoke even more passionately about the things they shared in common: their love for Christ, for his Church, and for each other. They repeatedly emphasized the importance of stressing essentials over non-essentials and valuing relationships over rituals. They met together on a regular basis, sometimes as a whole group and at other times in smaller bands of two or three. They prayed together, they worshipped together, they served together. They laughed together and they cried together. They encouraged each other and they forgave each other. In other words, they genuinely loved each other.

In the reflection papers that have followed these roundtable discussions over the years, students have continually marveled at the level of fellowship and cooperation exhibited by these local ministry mentors from KCMA. Most of these young men and women have grown up in the church, and a significant proportion of them are pastors' kids. Many of them come to Barclay specifically to prepare themselves for some form of spiritual leadership within the body of Christ – pastors, missionaries, evangelists, youth workers, music ministers, teachers, counselors, chaplains, etc. They have all heard the horror stories, and many have witnessed firsthand the hostility that so often exists between churches, between church leaders, and between church leaders and the congregations they serve. The KCMA experience almost sounded too good to be true. At least it did before May 4, 2007.

SECTION THREE: THE THESIS

By now it should be clear to even the most casual observer that we are in the midst of a genuine crisis in the church today. The reality is that pastors and other spiritual leaders are leaving vocational ministry faster than we can replace them. This is due primarily to the crippling effects of burnout, a pastoral pathology resulting from a lethal combination of extraordinary job-related stress and woefully inadequate self-care. As we have seen, this disturbing trend has devastating implications not only for church leaders and their families, but for the body of Christ as a whole: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Co 12:26). The church cannot “build itself up in love” unless “each part does its work” (Eph 4:16), and this requires the ministry of equipping that has been uniquely entrusted to church leaders (Eph 4:11-12).

It might also be useful to note that the Chinese word for “crisis” is actually derived from a character that combines two symbols, one representing *despair* and the other representing *opportunity*.¹ This reminds us that whenever we face a crisis of any kind, regardless of whether it was forced upon us or self-inflicted, we have crucial choices to make. How we respond to a given crisis will have lasting consequences for ourselves and for all those we influence.

Section three of this document will present a biblical and theological framework for specific proposals designed to reverse the current trend towards premature departure from public ministry. It is the claim of this author that providing opportunities for spiritual leaders to experience personal and professional renewal, in the context of a

¹ H. Norman Wright, *The New Guide to Crisis and Trauma Counseling* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 131.

supportive Christian community, will reduce the impact of burnout and help these men and women sustain effective, lifelong ministry in and through the body of Christ.

Diagnosing the Disease: Elijah and the Perils of Spiritual Heroism

While the challenges facing church leaders today are considerable, they are by no means unique to this generation. Spiritual leaders throughout biblical history have faced similar obstacles, and God-given opportunities for personal renewal have helped to sustain their lives and ministries as well. When Moses became so weary from leading the nation of Israel that he wanted to die, God provided a desert oasis and a team of 70 elders to help him carry the burden (Nu 11). When David was running for his life from Saul, God provided a cave where he could find refuge with his friends and family (1 Sa 22). When Elijah was scared to death by Jezebel's venomous threats, God provided a mountain retreat where he could rest from the battle and find strength to complete his task, with a little help from his friends (1 Ki 19). When Peter was overwhelmed by his failure to follow the call of Christ, God provided a seaside sanctuary where his hope was gently yet resolutely restored by the risen Lord himself in the company of his fellow disciples (Jn 21).

While each of the examples cited above has much to offer when it comes to understanding the dynamics of both burnout and renewal among spiritual leaders, Elijah's experience is especially intriguing in this regard. As we saw in section one, research has shown that there is a common pattern that precipitates nearly every case of clergy burnout: exhaustion>disillusionment>isolation>breakdown. When we review the biblical record in light of this information, it is not hard to see why Elijah,

one of the greatest prophets in the history of God's people, found himself preferring death over continued ministry (1 Ki 19:4).

Throughout his first few years of ministry preceding the breakdown at Mt. Horeb, Elijah had worked tirelessly to stem the tide of paganism in Israel, which had become increasingly rampant under the fraudulent leadership of King Ahab and his infamous wife, Queen Jezebel. This ongoing conflict finally came to a head at Mt. Carmel where Elijah summoned the people to gather, along with Ahab and all 850 of Jezebel's pagan prophets. Once everyone had assembled, the prophet summarized the situation succinctly: "How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Ki 18:21). Hearing no response, Elijah decided to up the ante by challenging the prophets of Baal to a spiritual duel of sorts. Despite the fact that the odds were 850:1 against him, Elijah's prophetic authority was confirmed with unmistakable clarity that day, as was Yahweh's unparalleled supremacy. When the people of Israel recognized this, every shred of ambiguity suddenly disappeared as they fell down and cried out with one voice: "Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!" (1 Ki 18:39).

This was heady stuff for a relatively inexperienced leader like Elijah. It might also be useful to remember at this point that Elijah's name in Hebrew is literally translated, "Yahweh is God." This raises some interesting questions. Were the people crying out to the Lord their God with newfound loyalty and allegiance, or were they expressing their adulation for the prophet who happened to be presiding over this whole affair? And what was Elijah thinking at this point? Were his motives so pure that he was immune to any temptation towards self-aggrandizement, or is it possible that he may have

found himself taking a little too much pleasure in the fact that thousands of people were bowing down before him, shouting his name in impassioned unison? If what follows this episode is any indication, it would appear that the latter scenario may be more accurate than we would like to think. It may also be more liberating.

At some place in the heart of every spiritual leader, there is a longing to be the spiritual hero, to be the one that people can count on, to be indispensable. Ironically, perhaps the most dangerous moment for a spiritual leader is when he or she actually gets to taste it. Elijah certainly did. And it almost killed him.

It takes a lot of energy to be a hero. In fact, it is downright exhausting. Human beings are not well-suited to play the role of Messiah. None of us is remotely qualified for the job. But that doesn't mean we will not try our best to fake it:

The hero is almost a given role, near axiomatic, even archetypal, for clergy. The hero fixes others, achieves status in the community, and focuses energies and affect on the problems of others. The hero works long hours, skips vacations, or if on vacation is bored and restless. The hero is well trained to run away from the emptiness or loneliness that might be uncovered during "time off"; it is better to keep working. This culminates in the "Messiah complex," the hero's delusion that his or her efforts are both supremely ordained and indispensable for others' health and salvation.²

Spiritual heroism is lethal because it is just one step away from idolatry, the very thing that Elijah was so adamantly opposing throughout his life and ministry. In reality, it is simply a more subtle form of the satanic whisper that began this whole downward spiral towards death and destruction in our world. "You will be like God," the serpent hissed (Gen 3:5). This must have sounded especially attractive to Elijah at Mt. Carmel. It had his name written all over it.

² Hands and Fehr, 9.

Satan tried this one on Jesus, too, during his temptation in the wilderness. But Jesus would have none of it. As Henri Nouwen reminds us, even the Messiah did not have a “Messiah complex”:

The second temptation to which Jesus was exposed was precisely the temptation to do something spectacular, something that could win him great applause. “Throw yourself down from the temple and let the angels catch you and carry you in their arms” (Mt 4:6). But Jesus refused to be a stunt man. He did not come to prove himself. He did not come to walk on hot coals, swallow fire, or put his hand in the lion’s mouth to demonstrate that he had something worthwhile to say.³

Spiritual heroism is the disease that lies at the core of clergy burnout. Like the HIV virus, it may remain dormant for a time, but if left untreated the symptoms will eventually manifest themselves. Spiritual heroism inevitably leads to *exhaustion*, because it requires enormous amounts of energy to play God. It inevitably leads to *disillusionment*, because it is impossible to keep up the charade indefinitely. And it inevitably leads to *isolation*, because, when you are “God,” it is really hard to find another human being who is your equal.

As Sally Morgenthaler can testify, spiritual heroism also fuels addictive behavior and other forms of moral meltdown that accompany the disease because it requires the leader to invest an enormous amount of energy in the self-defeating practice of “image management.” This helps to explain how high profile leaders like Ted Haggard, or Sally’s own husband, can “suddenly” crash and burn:

Many pastors paint unrealistic pictures of themselves. This kind of leader carefully crafts a leadership icon, rather than presenting his God-given, multi-faceted self. This kind of leader sets himself up for failure.

³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 53-54.

Image building is a dangerous game. And it's at the core of addictive behavior ... if a pastor comes into the ministry with an addictive family background or has otherwise developed addictive tendencies, a congregational system that requires him to uphold an impossible, squeaky-clean image is going to function like a match to the gasoline.

Whenever pastors try to hide behind this patina, the chances of latent addictive behavior escalating is extremely high. The more impossibly perfect the pastoral image, the greater the need to engage in taboo behavior.⁴

So what is the cure for spiritual heroism? It is the same course of action that Elijah and every other true prophet of the Lord would prescribe for any behavior that is contrary to the revealed will of God: *repentance*. We must turn from the error and futility of our ways, receive God's gracious promise of forgiveness, and allow him to restore to us the joy of our salvation (cf. Ps 51). As the psalmist learned from personal experience, we must realize that blessing comes through brokenness.⁵ But we can also rejoice in the reality that a "broken spirit" is the best safeguard against the more devastating and potentially fatal effects of a full-blown physical, emotional, moral or spiritual meltdown.

Pastor Peter Scazzero speaks from personal experience when he argues that the fruit of repentance for spiritual leaders must include a willingness to "receive the gift of limits":

Understanding and respecting our boundaries and limits is one of the most important character qualities and skills leaders need in order to be long-term lovers of God and others ... the frightening truth is that we can sometimes

⁴ Sally Morgenthaler, "Does Ministry Fuel Addictive Behavior?" *Leadership* (Winter 2006): 61. Our female colleagues seem to have an unusually clear understanding of these issues. Like Morgenthaler, author Susan Howatch has illustrated well the perils of spiritual heroism and image management in a series of six insightful novels based on the Church of England. Titles include *Glittering Images*, *Glamorous Powers* and *Ultimate Prizes*.

⁵ Gene Edwards' *A Tale of Three Kings* provides tremendous insight into the relationship between blessing and brokenness in the lives of spiritual leaders.

pass through our God-given limits and end up doing God's work without God!

Understanding the gift of limits enables us to affirm self-care. It is one of the greatest challenges for those who serve others. As Parker Palmer says, "Self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch."⁶

Drawing from Elijah's encounter with God at Mt. Horeb in 1 Kings 19, a biblical plan for treating and/or preventing burnout might include the following course of action:

- **Physical refreshment – as a remedy for *exhaustion* (cf. 1 Ki 19:5-8)**
- **Spiritual renewal – as a remedy for *disillusionment* (cf. 1 Ki 19:9-14)**
- **Vocational realignment – as a remedy for *isolation* (cf. 1 Ki 19:15-21)**

When practiced on a regular basis, these "renewing rituals"⁷ also strengthen our immune system against the onslaught of the core disease behind the symptoms – spiritual heroism. The very fact that we need them reminds us that we do have limits, i.e., we are NOT God!

Treating the Symptoms: Physical Refreshment as a Remedy for Exhaustion

Following his courageous confrontation with King Ahab and the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel, which had to be one of the most exhilarating AND exhausting ministry assignments in human history, Elijah finds himself running for his life, even wanting to die (19:3-4). This unexpected turn of events almost takes your breath away as you follow

⁶ Peter Scazzero, with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 136-146.

⁷ Special thanks to my friend, David Nixon, for contributing this term to my ministry vocabulary. See Dave's website for more information: <http://www.sustainablefaith.com>.

the story. The fearless prophet, previously confident and seemingly invincible, suddenly appears to panic, fleeing for his very life. Elijah was literally scared to death!

What happened? How does a mighty man of God abruptly turn into a paranoid, depressed, suicidal basket case? The answer gradually surfaces as we pay close attention to the Lord's counsel to Elijah in the midst of this crisis. The first three things that the Lord prescribed for Elijah as a remedy for his condition were the following: a good meal, a good night's sleep, and a good workout (19:5-8).

Elijah was completely and thoroughly exhausted. He had just come through what had to be the most traumatic experience in his whole life to that point. Following a supernatural sprint from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel (25 miles) and his panic-stricken flight from Jezreel to Beersheba (100 miles), Elijah set off on yet another strenuous hike, traveling “a day’s journey” (15 miles) into the desert. After an expedition like this, apparently without any food or water, Elijah was in desperate need of physical refreshment. It was only after he had received this gift of physical renewal from the Lord that he was able to experience the additional blessings of spiritual and vocational renewal as well. According to the God of the Bible, then, the One who formed us and knows us better than we know ourselves, three of the most critical disciplines related to self-care that we can and should practice if we hope to survive the enormous challenges and constant stress of public ministry are: *eating right, sleeping well and exercising regularly*.

Everywhere we go these days we are being reminded of the importance of physical fitness. The personal health benefits of eating right, sleeping well and exercising regularly have been well documented in recent years. Anyone who hopes to “live long and prosper” will recognize the value of these disciplines and make them a

central part of their daily lives. As disciples of Jesus, this takes on even greater significance when we remember that our bodies have now become “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Co 3:16). We are called to be good stewards of these bodies that have been given to us on loan from God. Stephanie Paulsell, a visiting lecturer at Harvard Divinity School and author of *Honoring the Body*, offers this summary:

For Christians, health and wellness are not just “physical” issues, but are deeply rooted theological concerns that, rightly understood, will require a change in thinking about the body ... there has always been this tension about the body not being important, and placing the work of the spirit over that of the body ... but in fact, everything in the Gospel [including the Incarnation itself] ... suggests that bodies matter to God, and through our bodies we’re invited to be in deep relationship with God.

People need to understand that ministry isn’t done by the disembodied mind, but by the whole embodied self ... we need churches to be communities where we talk about bodies and the care of bodies and what God expects from us.⁸

Studies of pastors and church leaders have repeatedly demonstrated the clear connections between our level of physical fitness and our capacity for effective, long-term Kingdom impact.⁹ Unfortunately, this is an area of obvious neglect among most clergy. As indicated earlier in this document, the majority of pastors are either overweight or obese, they get less than seven hours of sleep each night, and most do not have a regularly scheduled and implemented exercise routine. It is not surprising then, that clergy have one of the highest death rates from heart disease of any occupation.¹⁰

“This is not a call for guilt trips,” declares Lloyd Rediger, “it is a wake up call for those of us who have accepted the privilege of spiritual leadership.” The author of

⁸ Wells, 2-5.

⁹ Hands and Fehr, 75-76.

¹⁰ Wells, 3.

Clergy Killers goes on to emphasize the need for physical fitness among spiritual leaders as “responsible stewardship” and a primary resource for coping with conflict and spiritual attack in ministry. “When we are physically fit,” Rediger continues, “we experience less pain, we are less vulnerable, and we have more endurance and flexibility.”¹¹

When it comes to eating right, it is of special concern to this author that by far the most common problem that motivates female students to seek counseling at Barclay College is the issue of eating disorders.¹² These are young women who, by in large, come from Christian homes and are preparing for some form of spiritual leadership in the body of Christ. Having served as a college professor and campus pastor for the past nine years, it is this author’s conclusion that eating disorders are merely one of the Christian community’s “drugs of choice” when it comes to dealing with the unbearable weight of spiritual heroism and perfectionism. Since students from Christian homes do not have the freedom to express the deep pain associated with “falling short of the mark” through obvious outward rebellion (drugs, alcohol, premarital sex, etc.), they tend to turn this pain inward on themselves instead. This same principle applies to male students as well, but is most commonly expressed through addiction to pornography. The sad reality is that most current and prospective church leaders do not think very highly of themselves, which naturally lends itself to the neglect or abuse of their own bodies. This is clearly one of the greatest tragedies in the church today.

¹¹ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under Attack* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1997), 164.

¹² In his book *When Good Things Become Addictions* (Wheaton: Victor, 1990), psychologist Grant Martin cites statistics on page 89 indicating that as many as 60 to 80 million Americans may be affected by some form of eating disorders, including one in eight teenage girls and one out of four women from ages 19 to 39.

According to Paulsell, we must encourage spiritual leaders to practice a way of eating that “draws deeply on Christian faith” and is shaped by “choices that honor the body – our body and the bodies of others.”¹³ While cautioning against an unhealthy preoccupation with food, Paulsell does offer a number of practical suggestions, such as fasting from junk food, eating less meat, taking care not to waste food, and never eating without saying thanks. These are small but important steps, she asserts, that can help us remember that food is a gift from God.

Archibald Hart, former dean of the School of Psychology at Fuller Seminary, is one of many experts who emphasize the necessity of adequate self-care, especially for those who spend the majority of their time caring for others. In his book, *Adrenaline and Stress*, Hart helps us connect the dots between spiritual heroism, inadequate self-care and the crippling effects of burnout, such as heart disease:

Most of us live in a highly competitive and demanding life situation ... constantly on the move, striving to outdo others as we reach for greater things. In fact, most of us live our whole lives in what is essentially a constant state of emergency and hurry. We become dependent on the overproduction of adrenaline, not simply for our accomplishments, but just to survive each day. The problem with our dependence on high levels of adrenaline is that we have to pay the piper for this abuse later on. What it amounts to is accelerated “wear and tear” on our cardiovascular systems, creating burnout – much like a high performance car that has been allowed to overheat.¹⁴

Part of the solution, Hart agrees, is to develop better eating habits, including a reduction in the intake of saturated fats and high cholesterol foods. But his central argument throughout this particular book is that we have to look beyond the menu and find ways to change our basic pace of life. According to Hart, we are a nation (and a

¹³ Wells, 4.

¹⁴ Archibald D. Hart, *Adrenalin and Stress* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 22.

church) that has become addicted to adrenaline. Some of the symptoms of this adrenaline addiction include intense depression, difficulty getting energy going, being overcome by great tiredness, exhaustion and feelings of panic (sound familiar, Elijah?). Hart goes on to suggest that we can learn to manage stress and control our adrenaline levels by practicing effective relaxation, improving our sleeping habits and paying attention to our own spiritual development.¹⁵

In a recent survey conducted by the Barna Research Group, Americans were asked what they most looked forward to in life. “Getting a good night of sleep” was chosen by seven out of ten adults (71%), far and away the most popular response. This should not be surprising, considering the fact that as many as 50 million Americans sleep poorly, with one in five suffering from “stress-related insomnia,”¹⁶ not to mention the increasing prevalence of sleep apnea and other sleeping disorders. In summarizing the results of the Barna survey, the directors observed, “The fact that millions of Americans dream about having a good night of sleep is indicative of the lifestyle people lead ... we voluntarily exhaust ourselves and then wonder why life doesn’t seem satisfying.”¹⁷

As “adrenaline junkies,” Archibald Hart would remind us, our sleeplessness is directly related to our hyper-arousal throughout the day. We may even become convinced that getting too much sleep is a sign of laziness, weakness or a lack of spiritual zeal. The truth, Hart retorts, is that “we need all the sleep we can get.”¹⁸ He goes on to

¹⁵ Ibid., 88-89.

¹⁶ Hart, 145.

¹⁷ The Barna Group, “Americans Just Want A Good Night of Sleep,” *The Barna Update* (October 16, 2006), <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=247> (accessed October 31, 2008).

¹⁸ Hart, 145.

cite the work of such experts as the National Commission on Sleep Disorders, who recommend that the average person get a minimum of seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Based on his experience, Hart actually believes this is on the low end, and strongly suggests that a good stress-prevention plan would include between eight and ten hours of sleep each night, with an average of nine. Some people may need as much as eleven hours, he adds, depending on their age, lifestyle and level of physical health. The bottom line, Hart concludes, is that “most of us could improve our physical and emotional health dramatically if we just slept or rested a little longer than usual.”¹⁹

Thanks to advances in modern technology and a seemingly insatiable appetite for materialistic comfort, Americans have become some of the most sedentary people on the planet. Although our ethnocentricity often blinds us to this reality, the blinders quickly come off when we have opportunities to interact with foreign missionaries during their time at home on furlough. Well over 100 of these missional leaders have been prepared and sent out from Barclay College alone, and many of them return on a regular basis to share their experiences with our current students, faculty and staff. Upon their return to the United States, one of the first things our cross-cultural missionaries have repeatedly spoken of in recent years is their amazement at the dramatic increase in the size of our “big-screen” television monitors and “overstuffed” chairs. The most highly toned muscle in many American bodies today may be the one attached to whichever thumb happens to be operating the remote control!

As indicated earlier, our spiritual leaders are not immune from this “couch potato” mentality, with 57% of pastors stating that they do not have a regularly scheduled and

¹⁹ Ibid., 149-151.

implemented exercise routine.²⁰ This only exacerbates the health concerns arising from poor nutrition and insufficient sleep. When combined with the extraordinarily high levels of stress that normally accompany church leadership, it is easy to see how this can quickly become a lethal combination.

The good news is that it does not require a personal trainer or an expensive membership in a local health club to make the necessary adjustments in this area of self-care. Most health experts suggest that it only requires 30 minutes of exercise per day, five days per week to maintain an adequate level of physical fitness. Most importantly, this can incorporate “low impact” exercise, such as brisk walking, hiking or cycling. As one who is currently navigating the physical limitations that accompany mid-life, this author can testify to the personal enjoyment and practical health benefits that can be gained through participation in such activities. While full-court basketball may no longer be a viable option for many of us, there is nothing like a good bike ride to get the blood pumping, relieve stress, and burn off a few extra calories.

The most critical factor in any fitness program – whether it involves diet, rest or exercise – is not primarily the level of physical effort involved, but the integrity and intentionality with which we approach these personal disciplines. These are core characteristics of what Sam Rima refers to as “the art of self-leadership”:

What allows a leader to develop an organization that is healthy and vibrant, while the leader himself is grossly overweight and struggles with his own personal health and fitness? It is time that leaders, particularly spiritual leaders, begin to master the art of self-leadership to the same degree that they have mastered and practiced the techniques of organizational leadership. If a leader’s life does not reflect the same degree of excellence and skill that is manifested in the organization to which she gives leadership, it will eventually result in a dissonance that will erode the trust and respect of those being led. In today’s

²⁰ London and Wiseman, 172.

environment, where significant leadership failures are frequent in virtually every arena and there exists a pervasive cynicism and lack of trust directed toward those in leadership, mastering the art of self-leadership has never been more essential to the achievement of effective, holistic leadership.²¹

Treating the Symptoms: Spiritual Renewal as a Remedy for Disillusionment

The pursuit of spiritual heroism not only leads to exhaustion, but it inevitably generates an overwhelming sense of disillusionment in the process. This was certainly the case for Elijah following his dramatic encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. He had done everything he possibly could to expose the futility of the Phoenician fertility cult. When such efforts failed to persuade Ahab and the people of Israel to forsake these pagan gods and return fully to the Lord, the “gloves came off” and Yahweh himself made a point to confirm the prophet’s message with unmistakable clarity. There was only one problem – it did not work. Or at least not the way that Elijah was hoping and *expecting* that it would.

Imagine the initial exhilaration this triumphant prophet must have been feeling as he was leading the royal chariot all the way back to Jezreel on an apparent victory parade. Adrenaline must have been rushing through every part of his body as he imagined the joyous welcome that was surely awaiting him when he arrived at his destination. Accompanied by a surprisingly cooperative king and the return of much-needed rain to

²¹ Samuel D. Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out: The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 29-30. For those who are interested in exploring the topic of self-leadership further, Rima has a website (www.samrma.com) which provides additional resources based on this book and its predecessor, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), co-written with Gary McIntosh. For a nominal fee, Rima promises to “coach you in completing the on-line, interactive workshops and assist you in developing your Personal Constitution, Self-leadership Plan, as well as your Dark Side Profile and a Personal Plan to manage your dark side so that it doesn't mitigate your leadership. Then, I will help hold you accountable to living out your self-leadership plans and coach you through the initial obstacles you will face.” This author has found such resources to be of great benefit in the development of an ongoing plan for personal fitness, discipleship and spiritual formation.

the parched Palestinian countryside, Elijah must have been anxiously anticipating the moment when the evil Queen Jezebel herself would finally be forced to acknowledge Yahweh's supremacy, bowing before his designated prophet as an expression of her unqualified surrender. He could hardly wait!

What a crushing disappointment it must have been when Elijah was greeted upon his arrival at Jezreel, not with shouts of acclamation but with "wanted" posters and death threats circulating throughout the city. Yahweh's demonstration of power at Mt. Carmel had left the prophet's arch-rival anything but subdued and submissive. Jezebel wanted Elijah's head on a platter! This unexpected turn of events left the previously invincible prophet overcome by fear, to be sure, but a much deeper and more devastating sensation was lurking just below the surface, and it was about to erupt:

Fear is hardly all there is to say about Elijah's reaction when learning of Jezebel's outrage ... profound disillusionment presents itself as another possible view of Elijah's state of mind ... the success at Mount Carmel leads him to expect that the fallacy of Baal worship has been exposed and his opponents definitively subdued. However, the results fall short of his expectations, as evidenced by Jezebel's unyielding antagonism ... when Elijah tries to come to grips with the failure of the crushing display of power to soften his antagonist, he retreats dejected to Horeb ... if fear is the emotion that starts him off on the long journey, it is not what motivates him to complete it.²²

This also helps to explain why Elijah not only ran *from* Jezebel, but ran directly *to* Mt. Horeb. There were any number of other places, most of them much less distant, where he could have gone to escape from the queen's fury and recover his physical strength, if that was all he had lost. But the fact that he chose Horeb as his specific destination indicates that he was looking for far more than physical safety and security. Elijah was in

²² Sigve Tonstad, "The Limits of Power: Revisiting Elijah and Horeb," *SJOT* 19, no. 2 (2005): 256.

desperate search of a way to make sense of what he had just experienced. It was not so much his fear of Jezebel that drove him to Horeb. It was his fear of God.

In his journey to Horeb, “the mount of God,” Elijah was going back to where it all began. As Martin Buber suggests, he was returning “on Israel’s tracks to the mountain of revelation”²³ to plead his case before Yahweh himself, the God of Israel. As he traveled “forty days and forty nights” (1 Ki 19:8) through the desert along the way, Elijah was following in the footsteps of Moses, Israel’s very first spokesman and prophet. It was at Horeb that Israel was founded as a people, and where the Lord had promised to be their God. It was at Horeb that the people of God entered into a covenant to “have no other gods” before him (Ex 20:3). And it was at Horeb where that promise was broken in what would be the first of a seemingly endless list of betrayals.

No, Elijah was far from an accidental tourist when he arrived at Mt. Horeb. He was there on purpose. He had a grievance to file, and he was determined to appeal to the highest court in the land. When Elijah’s words are read in their original context, the disappointment and disillusionment is palpable: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (1 Ki 19:10). This isn’t what Elijah had signed up for. He had kept his part of the covenant, so why wasn’t God keeping his? He had been faithful and obedient, and he had led the rest of God’s people to renounce their infidelity and purge the land of their pagan oppressors. Was it unfair or unrealistic to expect God to keep his end of the bargain by subduing Israel’s enemies under her feet (cf. Ex 20:20-33),

²³ Ibid.

including the ruthless ringleader (Jezebel) herself? So what gives? If this is how things are going to be handled, Elijah would rather die than be party to it!

If there is an eerily familiar tone to these sentiments, it's because they have been spoken before in some form by many other spiritual leaders through the ages. Having worked long and hard to lead the people of Israel out of bondage and into the Promised Land, Moses became increasingly disgusted by their perpetual resistance and by how he felt this reflected on his own leadership. His complaint was similar to Elijah's: "If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now – if I have found favor in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin" (Nu 11:15). When the Lord chose to extend mercy to Jonah's enemies instead of judgment, he expressed his disappointment with equal finality: "Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jon 4:2-3). And then there is Job, of course, whose stoic expectations for personal vindication were repeatedly dashed by an escalating array of trials and temptations. Finally, when his disillusionment had reached its boiling point and he could take it no more, Job "opened his mouth and cursed the day he was born" (Job 3:1). This was a familiar refrain for Jeremiah as well, when his faithful proclamation of God's word was met with nothing but ridicule, insult and reproach (Jer 20:7-18). Each of these "Bible heroes" found themselves at a point of desperate despair based on the fact that they were simply incapable of producing the results they had so earnestly anticipated.

Spiritual heroism inevitably breeds disillusionment because it is supremely results-oriented rather than relationship-oriented. Like modern comic book heroes, spiritual heroes are typically defined by their performance. A classic example of this can be found in a famous line from the 2005 film, *Batman Begins*. When asked to reveal his

true identity, the Dark Knight declares, “It’s not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me.” The problem with this method of evaluating ourselves and others, including God, is not only that it fails to take into account the self-defeating perils of this performance-based mentality, it also ignores the deeper realities that drive human behavior. While it is certainly true that we are all “known by our fruit” (Mt 12:33), it is equally important to remember that the fruit of our lives is determined by the quality of our root system, for it is “out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34). Since our hearts are always rooted in relationships, it is the quality of our relationships that will ultimately determine the quality of our lives and ministries. “Abide in me,” Jesus says, “and you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Belonging always precedes behaving.

This is one of the clearest and most liberating hallmarks of authentic Christianity. Followers of Jesus are not defined first and foremost by the level of their religious activity, but by the depth of their relational affiliation. Righteousness for the Christian, in contrast to every other faith tradition in the world, is not based primarily on one’s performance for God, but on one’s personal encounter with God. Unlike Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam, Christianity must first be received before it can be achieved: “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

Literally speaking, to be a Christian is to be a “Christ one” or a “little Christ.” Throughout the New Testament, members of the Church are continually identified as those who are “in Christ” (Eph 1:1; Php 1:1; Col 1:2) because they are “loved by God” and “belong to Jesus Christ” (1 Co 1:6-7). By the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ, through the power of his Holy Spirit, we have been adopted into the family of God and have become co-heirs with Christ as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father (Rm 8:15-17). While it may sound too good to be true, this means that when the Father looks at each of us he declares the very same thing that he first announced to Jesus: “You are my [son or daughter], whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22). This means that, through our relationship with Christ, we now have everything we could possibly need: *Someone to belong to* (“you are my son/daughter”), *Someone to be loved by* (“whom I love”), and *Someone to believe in us* (“with you I am well pleased”). This is not a product to be purchased; it is a revelation to be received.

With this in mind, it is fascinating to note that when God the Father chose to renew his affirmation of Jesus as the glorious One through whom he would reveal his plan of redemption for the whole world, he would do so in a still, small voice on a mountaintop in the company of two divinely appointed companions, Moses and Elijah (Lk 9:28-36). This is the same Moses who asked to be “put to death” some 1,400 years earlier when faced with the overwhelming weight of leading God’s people out of their bondage in Egypt. This is the same Elijah who “prayed that he might die” some 800 years earlier in light of his apparent failure to secure their release from the grip of Phoenician idolatry. And this is the same Moses and Elijah who experienced much-needed refreshment, renewal and restoration in the presence of the living God.

Is it possible that as Moses and Elijah met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration that day, and as they “spoke about his *departure*” (Gk, ἐξοδον or *exodus*), that they were there to reassure a weary Savior that his labor was not in vain? That in spite of the constant opposition he was facing and the relatively sparse support he

was able to marshal to that point, that the Father had not abandoned him and would provide him with the strength to finish his task? Or was this theophany primarily intended to encourage Jesus' current traveling companions – Peter, James and John – to keep the faith and stand firm in their allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Messiah, despite apparent evidence to the contrary? Could it be that these dozing disciples were facing the very same temptations that Moses and Elijah had faced during their years in spiritual leadership, including disillusionment and despair, and was this manifestation of the glory of God in the presence of Christ intended to assure them that they were not crazy after all and to encourage them to see this journey to the end? And is it possible that the main point for Moses, Elijah, Jonah, Job, Jeremiah, Peter, James, John and every other spiritual leader through the ages is that our God is ultimately much more interested in our *intimacy* than in our *productivity*?²⁴

As strange as it may seem, this painful experience of disillusionment would appear to be a prerequisite for the development of a genuinely intimate, sustainable faith. In fact, the very definition of disillusionment is “to be free of illusion or naïve faith and trust.”²⁵ As one of my college professors was known to say, “Faith is fashioned in the workshop of doubt.” Or as Peter Scanzero has put it, we must be willing to journey through “the Wall”:

Emotionally healthy spirituality requires you to go through the pain of the Wall – or, as the ancients called it, “the dark night of the soul.” For many, going back in order to go forward thrusts us up against the Wall. Others are brought to it by circumstances and crises beyond their control.

²⁴ Fil Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 1-6.

²⁵ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. “Disillusion,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustain> (accessed November 19, 2008).

Jesus called the twelve disciples to a journey that would change their lives forever. Judas, however, grew disillusioned and got stuck along the way ... Judas's "stuckness" eventually resulted in him quitting Christ altogether, resulting in perhaps history's saddest account of a wasted opportunity!

I meet many believers today who also are stuck. Some have dropped out altogether. Tragically, they fail to see the larger picture of the transforming work God seeks to do in them at their Wall. The disorientation and pain of their present circumstances blinds them. And they feel unsuccessful in finding other companions for such a journey. What most don't understand is that growth into maturity in Christ requires us to go through the Wall.

This is God's way of rewiring and "purging our affections and passions" that we might delight in his love and enter into a richer, fuller communion with him. God wants to communicate to us his true sweetness and love. He longs that we might know his true peace and rest. He works to free us from unhealthy attachments and idolatries of the world. He longs for an intimate, passionate love relationship with us.

Going through the Wall breaks something deep within us – that driving, grasping, fearful self-will that must produce, that must make something happen, that must get it done for God (just in case he doesn't).²⁶

Elijah hit "the Wall" at Mt. Horeb. He was "thrust up against it" as he made his way back on Israel's tracks to the mountain of revelation. Like Judas, he "grew disillusioned and got stuck along the way." And he surely would have "dropped out altogether" if not for one life-saving reality: God was waiting for him at the Wall.

Once again, the remedy that the Lord had to offer Elijah in the midst of his despair and disillusionment was probably not what he expected. What Elijah may have thought he needed was greater access to God's *power*. What the Lord knew Elijah needed was a greater awareness of his *presence* (1 Ki 19:11a). More than anything, Elijah needed to be with God:

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an

²⁶ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 117-133.

earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. *And after the fire came a gentle whisper.* And when Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave (1 Ki 19:11b-13a, emphasis mine).

The Hebrew phrase rendered here as “gentle whisper” has also been translated as a “still, small voice” (KJV), a “soft, gentle voice” (Darby), the “sound of a low whisper” (ESV), the “sound of a gentle blowing” (NASB), or even “the sound of sheer silence” (NRSV). Basically, modern translators are at a loss to conclusively describe this manifest presence of God. They should not feel bad. So was Elijah. One of Israel’s greatest spokesmen was at a complete loss for words. To borrow from Brennan Manning, he was “dazed, dumbstruck ... and suddenly seized by the power of a great affection.”²⁷ All he could do was stand in silent awe at the “mouth” of the cave, hanging on God’s every word. It is amazing what God can do if preachers will just stop talking!

When we read the Gospels, it is interesting to note that the first call of a disciple is not to preach, teach, pray, heal, deliver, serve, lead, build, empower or transform. According to Jesus, the first call of a disciple is to “be with him” (Mk 3:14). Good thing, too, because at the end of the day, this is also the only thing that cannot be taken away from us (cf. Lk 10:19-20; 41-42). Even our most powerful and persuasive ministries will one day cease, but his personal presence will never end: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20; cf. 1 Co 13:8-13).

There is no better remedy for disillusionment than dwelling in the presence of the Lord. When we hit the Wall, we can do nothing better than sit still and wait: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;

²⁷ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Embracing the Unconditional Love of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1990), 199.

they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Is 40:31, KJV). As Blaise Pascal has testified, “There is a God-shaped vacuum inside each one of us that cannot be filled by anything but God.” Spiritual renewal is the only sure remedy for disillusionment.

So why do we find it so hard to simply sit still and wait upon the Lord? Quaker author Thomas Kelly has summarized our situation quite well:

The problem we face today needs very little time for its statement. Our lives ... grow too complex and overcrowded ... in frantic fidelity we try to meet at least the necessary minimum of calls upon us. But we're weary and breathless. And we know and regret that our life is slipping away ... in guilty regret we must postpone till next week that deeper life of unshaken composure in the holy Presence, where we sincerely know our true home is, for this week is much too full.²⁸

For those of us who serve in Christian leadership, words like these can strike us in much the same way that a prize fighter might land a blow to the gut of his opponent. The truth hurts. And it hurts even more when we have been hit in the same place many times before. We feel vulnerable. Our weak spot has been exposed. We are all familiar with “frantic fidelity.” We live in a time of unprecedented complexity and confusion. Our emerging “iCulture” (iPods, iTunes, iPhones, etc.) is obsessed with novelties, gadgets and an endless variety of “time-saving” electronic devices. The world has never known a society with more leisure time on its hands, and yet, we are among the most chronically exhausted, stressed-out people on the planet.

In his *Testament of Devotion*, Kelly provides us with an eerily Elijah-esque description of our common condition as well as our common cry:

We are not integrated. We are distraught. We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained,

²⁸ Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: HarperCollins, 1941), 89-90.

oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow. For over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of richer living which we know we are passing by. Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power. If only we could slip over into that Center! If only we could find the Silence which is the source of Sound!²⁹

Thankfully, there is hope for those of us who continue to struggle against the forces that would keep us from “slipping over into that Center” of Divine Love, out of which we are enabled to love others as we have been loved by God. This hope can be found not only in the words that spiritual leaders like Thomas Kelly have written, but in the lives they have lived. For Kelly, living out of the Divine Center came late in life, with the pivotal event taking place sometime in the autumn of 1937. According to the author’s friend and biographer, Douglas Steere, it was during this time that “a new life direction took place in Thomas Kelly. No one knows exactly what happened, but ... a fissure in him seemed to close, cliffs caved in and filled up a chasm, and what was divided grew together within him.” A year later, following a summer visit among Friends in Germany, Kelly himself testified to Steere, “It is wonderful. I have been literally melted down by the love of God.”³⁰

Could it be that each of us is not so different from Thomas Kelly, not to mention every other spiritual leader who has gone before us? Could it be that the quickest way to the Divine Center is to recognize and renounce our tendency to live on the fringe of God’s purpose for our lives? Could it be that the only way for the spiritual fissures in our

²⁹ Ibid., 92.

³⁰ Ibid., 118, 120. See also T. Canby Jones, *Thomas Kelly as I Remember Him* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1988), 25-31. According to Jones, a friend and student of Kelly, this “cataclysmic event” was preceded by a series of devastating disappointments which were accompanied by seasons of depression, suicidal thoughts and a complete nervous breakdown. Special thanks to my friend Richard Sartwell for bringing this to my attention.

lives to close is by allowing the retaining walls we have built up around our souls to cave in? Could it be that the best antidote for “frantic fidelity” is a “holy meltdown”?

Like Elijah, God is calling each of us to remember that it is *his* work, not *ours* that we are invited to be a part of. “It is not we alone who are at work in the world, frantically finishing a work to be offered to God,” Thomas Kelly summarizes, so “we need not get frantic. He is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well.”³¹

This is why spiritual disciplines play such a critical role in the process that Peter Scazzero refers to as “waiting at the Wall.”³² While many of these practices have been central to the lives of Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers for centuries, there has been a welcome resurgence of interest in contemplative spirituality among evangelicals as well in recent years. Thanks in great part to the work of Richard Foster, the benefits of incorporating classic spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, meditation, solitude, silence, confession, spiritual direction and Sabbath rest are becoming widely recognized once again as essential components in the ongoing practice of personal and spiritual renewal. As Foster has stated, “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”³³

Disillusionment does not discriminate on the basis of time, culture or personality. It has been a common experience throughout church history, and spiritual renewal has been an essential component for sustaining the ministries of spiritual leaders

³¹ Ibid., 100.

³² Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 131.

³³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th Anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 1.

throughout the ages as well. When worldliness was threatening to undermine the integrity and vitality of the ancient church, desert fathers such as Antony of Egypt retreated to their solitary cells in an attempt to carve out another, more strenuous alternative to lukewarm, “politically correct” Christianity. Spiritual leaders such as Francis of Assisi later established monastic orders during the dark, middle ages through which God preserved a faithful remnant of disciples devoted to prayer, service and holy living. Fiery reformers such as Martin Luther ignited a new wave of spiritual fervor among God’s people by giving them Scripture in their own language. And when the fires of the Reformation began to grow cold, God raised up Quakers like George Fox and Methodists like John Wesley to provide a passionate, evangelical antidote to the deadening formalism of the established church. Like Elijah before them, each of these spiritual leaders found themselves increasingly disillusioned by their own religious experience, and each one was called to break away from the confusing clatter of religious posturing and performance in order to hear the still, small voice of God inviting them to enter into intimate communion with Christ and the community of faith.

The reality is that every spiritual leader will battle with disillusionment at some point. As in any marriage, there are predictable stages that we must go through in our relationship with Christ. There is the honeymoon stage, the disillusionment stage, and the fulfillment stage. The key to overcoming the potentially fatal impact of disillusionment and experiencing a long and fulfilling life and ministry lies, in great part, in one’s capacity for sustaining ongoing spiritual renewal. There is no substitute for the still, small voice of God.

As Jesus' own life and ministry demonstrates, this requires the intentional incorporation of a "holy rhythm" of engagement and withdrawal. It is illuminating to note that Jesus spent the first 30 years of his life in relative obscurity, quietly preparing for three, short years of public ministry (cf. Lk 3:23). What's even more fascinating is that during these three years of intense engagement in service to others, the gospel writers tell us that Jesus made a regular habit of withdrawing to "lonely places" for prayer, often at the most unexpected and seemingly inopportune moments (cf. Lk 5:16). When he emerged from these periods of solitude, however, he typically returned to ministry with a renewed sense of passion and purpose, even more strenuously engaged in his messianic mission (cf. Lk 6:12-16; 9:10-17, 28-45; 11:1-28; 22:39-23:46). Unlike the crowds he sought to serve, and the apostles he longed to lead, Jesus was called, not driven.³⁴

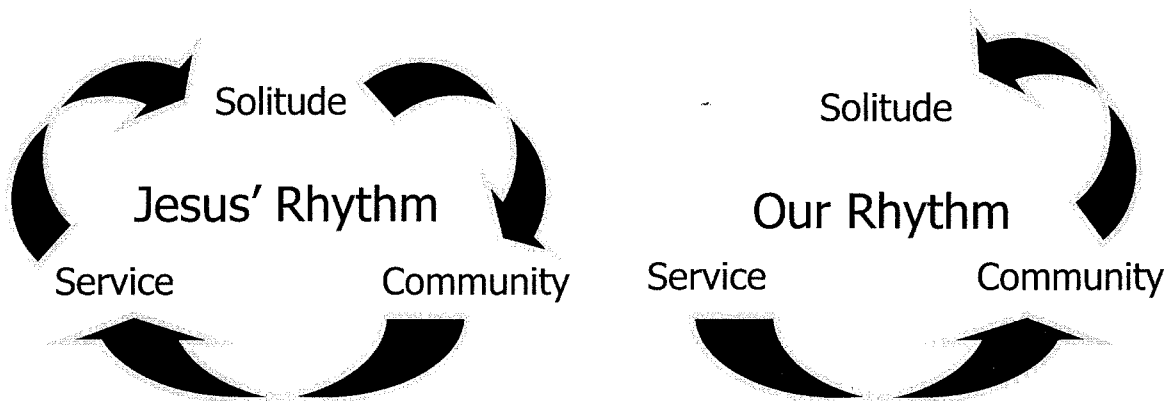
Like Moses the Lawgiver, Jesus knew the *shema* by heart: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Dt 6:4). Like Samuel the Judge, he had learned to pray, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is *listening*" (1 Sa 3:9). Like David the King, he could testify, "my *ears* you have pierced" (Ps 40:6). And like Elijah the Prophet, he knew how to recognize the "still, small *voice* of God" (1 Ki 19:12). It is no accident that Jesus knew and obeyed the Father's will with clarity and confidence. He was literally hanging on his every word.

Like Jesus, Christian leaders today must learn to listen well if we have any hope of discerning the call of God in this age of ever-increasing complexity and confusion. We must also learn to "breathe." Just as the human respiratory system

³⁴ Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 29-30.

requires a balance of both inhalation and exhalation, so we must learn to practice the art of “spiritual respiration.” We must recognize our resistance to silence and solitude and renounce our propensity to work *for* God instead of *with* God.³⁵ This is the only reliable remedy for disillusionment, and the only sure cure for spiritual heroism. Like Jesus’ first disciples, we too must learn “the unforced rhythms of grace” (Mt 11:29, MSG).

The Rhythms of Grace³⁶



As this diagram illustrates, we have too often “reversed the rhythm” that God himself has so clearly revealed to us in and through Christ. Jesus’ life and ministry were consistently rooted in his solitary communion with the Father, out of which he was prepared to enter into genuine community with his disciples, with whom he was fully equipped to serve the needs of the crowds (cf. Lk 6:12-17). In stark contrast, we tend to begin by passionately plunging into the great work of the gospel, which quickly proves to be too much for any one of us on our own, which forces us to feverishly solicit the

³⁵ Anderson, 3-4.

³⁶ Dan Brunner, class notes from *DMIN 512 Spiritual Formation and the Minister* (October 27, 2006).

assistance of our fellow believers. This eventually wears them out as well, which leaves everyone exhausted, disillusioned and isolated as we each withdraw into our solitary fortresses of self-pity and self-protection. Is there any way out of this vicious cycle?

According to Eugene Peterson, translator of *The Message*, one of the best ways out of this mess is readily available for all those who are willing to enter *in* to the rest that is offered by God through the discipline of Sabbath keeping:

Every profession has sins to which it is especially liable ... I've had my eye on the snare from which pastors need deliverance: it is the sin of reversing the rhythms. Instead of grace/work we make it work/grace. Instead of working in a world in which God calls everything into being with his words and redeems his people with an outstretched arm, we rearrange it as a world in which we preach the mighty work of God and in afterthought ask him to bless our speaking.

That, of course, is why so few pastors keep a Sabbath: we have reversed the rhythms.

Perhaps that is why the Sabbath is *commanded*, not *suggested*, for nothing less than a command has the power to intervene in the vicious, accelerating, self-perpetuating cycle of faithless and graceless busyness, the only part of which we are conscious being our good intentions.

Not many of us preach vigorously on the seventh commandment and then pursue lives of active adultery. But we conscientiously catechize our people on the fifth commandment and without a blush flaunt our workaholic Sabbath-breaking as evidence of an extraordinary piety.

Sabbath keeping: quieting the internal noise so we hear the still, small voice of our Lord. Removing the distractions of pride so we discern the presence of Christ.³⁷

Not only is Sabbath keeping one of the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex 20:8-11), universal standards given by God for the protection and provision of his people, but it is also one of the most effective ways to ward off the crippling effects of what Gordon MacDonald has called "The Sinkhole Syndrome":

³⁷ Eugene Peterson, "The Pastor's Sabbath," *Leadership* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 55-56.

Sinkholes occur, scientists say, when underground streams drain away during seasons of drought, causing the ground at the surface to lose its underlying support. Suddenly everything caves in, leaving people with a frightening suspicion that nothing – not even the earth beneath their feet – is trustworthy.

It is likely that at one time or another many of us have perceived ourselves to be on the verge of a sinkhole-like cave-in. In the feelings of numbing fatigue, a taste of apparent failure, or the bitter experience of disillusionment about goals or purposes, we may have sensed something within us about to give way. We feel we are just a moment away from a collapse that will threaten to sweep our entire world into a bottomless pit.³⁸

Sadly, this is exactly what happened to MacDonald and his wife, Gail, in 1986 when it came to light that Gordon had entered into an extramarital affair with another woman, a scandal that sent shockwaves throughout the evangelical community at the time. Far from discrediting his teaching on the importance of self-care and personal discipline, Gordon's moral failure only served to underscore the necessity of staying vigilant in these areas of spiritual leadership. Thankfully, the MacDonalds were able to survive this "sinkhole" in their personal lives and experience the restoration of their marriage and, to a great extent, their public ministry. Gordon continues to write and speak on the topic of personal and spiritual renewal, and he places Sabbath rest at the center of this discussion: "If my private world is in order, it will be because I have chosen to press Sabbath peace into the rush and routine of my daily life in order to find the rest God prescribed for Himself and all of humanity."³⁹ If God himself finds value in keeping the Sabbath (cf. Gen 2:2-3; Lk 4:16), chances are it will be good for us as well.

Spiritual renewal also works its way into our lives as we take time to meditate on Scripture, the written word of God. As Jesus declared during his temptation in the

³⁸ MacDonald, 13.

³⁹ Ibid., 172.

wilderness, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). And it was his continual reliance on Scripture that empowered Christ to persevere throughout his public ministry, from beginning (Mt 4:10) to end (Mt 27:46). Spiritual leaders, like everything else in God’s universe, are held together by the One who “*sustains* all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3, NRSV, emphasis mine).

This was certainly the case for G. Campbell Morgan, the Puritan preacher whose ministry spanned two continents and parts of two centuries (1863-1945). Inspired by D.L. Moody’s first tour of England in 1873, Morgan preached his first sermon at the age of thirteen. But much like Elijah, he soon found himself engulfed in doubt and disillusionment concerning his faith and his call to ministry. Remembering those chaotic years, Morgan later wrote, “The only hope for me was the Bible ... I stopped reading books about the Bible and began to read the Bible itself. I saw the light and was back on the path.”⁴⁰ For seven years thereafter, his reading concerning the things of God was confined to the Word of God itself. Once again, it was the still, small voice of God that spoke renewal and restoration into the life of this spiritual leader.

As the story goes, someone once asked G. Campbell Morgan, “Why is it that God does not speak to men today as he did to men of old?” Drawing, no doubt, from his countless hours of meditation on God’s word, Morgan instinctively replied, “Perhaps the answer is that God has not stopped speaking at all, but that we have stopped listening to God as men of old once did.”

⁴⁰ Shelton Smith, “G. Campbell Morgan,” (Sword of the Lord Publishers, 2008), <http://www.swordofthelord.com/biographies/MorganGCampbell.htm> (accessed December 16, 2008).

One of the best ways to expand our capacity for hearing God's voice through Scripture is by practicing the ancient discipline of *lectio divina*, or sacred reading. In contrast to a modern, scientific approach to the study of Scripture in which we are encouraged to "work on the text," this ancient practice emphasizes the importance of allowing the text to work on us. Like a cow chewing its cud, *lectio divina* provides a wonderful way to allow God's word to ruminate in our hearts and minds through a patient, contemplative reading of Scripture.

As spiritual leaders, we must be constantly reminded that there is a critical difference between the *theological study* of Scripture and the *devotional reading* of Scripture. It is entirely possible for pastors and other church leaders to devote endless hours to *studying* the word of God while failing to *encounter* the God of the word. This helps us understand why our Bibles are divided into two testaments, or *covenants*. The Bible is not simply a book of facts and figures. It is the story of God's relationship with his people. God's deepest desire is not merely to be understood, but to be adored and embraced. As Brother Lawrence would remind us, "He alone ... can reveal Himself to us; we toil and exercise our mind in reason and in science, forgetting that therein we can see only a copy, whilst we neglect to gaze on the Incomparable Original."⁴¹

Prayer is yet another critical discipline for every spiritual leader who desires to hear and respond to the still, small voice of God. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the recent experience of the church in South Korea. It is no coincidence that the Korean church currently sends out more missionaries into the world than any country other than

⁴¹ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1958), 87.

the United States (and they send far more per capita than we do!). Like every other great movement of God throughout the history of the Christian church, the current South Korean missionary movement is fueled by a passion for prayer. It is not uncommon for Korean pastors to spend four to five hours each day in prayer in order to be adequately prepared for the work that God has laid before them. This may also help to explain why ten of the eleven largest churches in the world are located in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea.⁴²

Several years ago this author had the privilege of visiting Yoido Full Gospel Church, reported to be the largest church in the world with a current membership of approximately 830,000 people. More impressive than these staggering numbers, however, is the fact that nearly every one of these church members is being discipled through a network of over 75,000 cell groups. When the founding pastor, David Yonggi Cho, was asked to provide an explanation for the explosive growth and global impact that this church has experienced under his leadership over the past 40 years, he offered this simple yet profound reply: *“I listen and I obey.”*

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus demonstrated with unmistakable clarity that spiritual discernment is not so much an event as it is a continuing conversation. In what has often been referred to as “the praying gospel,” Luke repeatedly testifies that it was “as he was praying” that Jesus heard the voice of God and made his power manifest among the people (cf. Lk 3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1; 22:32, 41; 23:34, 46). This reminds us that our capacity to hear God’s voice in the midst of a spiritual crisis will depend for

⁴² Patrick J. Johnstone, Robyn J. Johnstone, and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World 21st Century* ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster USA, 2001), 387-388.

the most part on how attentive we have been to his voice in the midst of our everyday routines. In other words, the clarity of each *revelation* from God will be directly dependent upon the quality of our *relationship* with God. Dallas Willard illustrates this point very well in his book, *In Search of Guidance*:

From primitive ritual to “Bible roulette” so common among present-day believers, we see both the desperate urgency and superstitious character of human efforts to get a word from God on what is going to happen and what we should do. If necessary, to *force* it from Him or someone else. We *will* have our own peculiar “witch of Endor” (1 Samuel 28). Here as elsewhere we must take with utmost seriousness Jesus’ words: “No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). And this means, above all else, that the conscious seeking of divine guidance is safe and sensible only within that life of experiential union with God in His Kingdom ... divine guidance cannot be ours as a reliable and intelligible fact of life except when seen as one aspect of God’s presence with us and His life in us. Only our *communion* with God provides the appropriate context of *communications* between us and Him⁴³

In his book, *Everything Belongs*, author Richard Rohr borrows the concept of “kinesthetic knowing” to describe the role of contemplative prayer in the shaping of our God-given calling and identity. “We know ourselves in the security of those who hold us and gaze upon us,” Rohr summarizes, and this he illustrates with the word picture of an infant gazing into his or her mother’s eyes: “What her eyes tell us about ourselves, we believe and become. Prayer is much the same: we receive and return the divine gaze.”⁴⁴

The ultimate purpose behind each of these disciplines, and many others we have not discussed, is to help us hear and respond to the “still, small voice of God.” This, in turn, enables us to ignore other competing voices, both internal and external, so that we

⁴³ Dallas Willard, *In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984), 33.

⁴⁴ Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 67.

might be empowered to overcome despair and disillusionment as we live and serve before an “Audience of One”:

A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before the audience that trumps all others – the Audience of One ... [like the Puritans before us] we who live before the Audience of One can say to the world: “I have only one audience. Before you I have nothing to prove, nothing to gain, nothing to lose.”

Needless to say, the modern world is light years from the Puritan world. We have moved from the “inner directed” world of the Puritans, in which calling acted as an inner compass, to the “other directed” world of modern society, in which our contemporaries are our real guides – and a roving radar ranges to pick up their cues ... the Puritans lived as if they had swallowed gyroscopes; we modern Christians live as if we have swallowed Gallup polls.⁴⁵

It might be helpful to close this discussion on the importance of listening with a parable. There is a legend from the Old West about a group of prospective telegraph operators who were seeking employment with the Union Pacific Railroad. When the day to be interviewed for this prestigious position finally arrived, each of these men gathered in a large waiting room outside of the director’s office, eagerly anticipating the opportunity to showcase their respective qualifications for the job. After waiting together for a short time, one of the youngest applicants suddenly stood up from the back of the room and walked right into the director’s office. A few minutes later, this same young man returned to the waiting room, with the director following close behind. “I have an announcement to make,” the director declared. “We have found the right man for the job. Thank you all for your interest. You are free to go.”

Shocked and dismayed by this sudden turn of events, the remaining applicants felt like they had been routinely dismissed without receiving a fair hearing. One of the more experienced applicants promptly rose to his feet to register his complaint with the

⁴⁵ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 70-72.

director: “I beg your pardon, sir, but this situation is completely unacceptable. Many of us have been working for years just to be considered for this job, and yet when one of the youngest and least experienced among us strolls uninvited into your office you casually dismiss our collective resources and give the job to this amateur instead. With all due respect, I believe we deserve an explanation!”

“Certainly,” the director replied, “the explanation is actually quite simple. While you were all sitting in the waiting room, I was sitting in my office sending the following message over the telegraph: ‘If you can hear this message, come into my office immediately. The job is yours.’ This young man’s response clearly demonstrated his unique qualifications for the job.”

The “still, small voice of God” is not limited to momentary, mountain-top experiences. God is always speaking. The only question is ... are we listening?

Treating the Symptoms: Vocational Realignment as a Remedy for Isolation

If it is true that we have been called to live and serve *before* an “Audience of One,” it is also true that we have been created to do so *within* a wider community of companions. Like Frodo Baggins, the unlikely hero in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, every disciple of Jesus has been given a great mission to accomplish. And like Frodo, we quickly discover that we are going to need a lot of help along the way. Thankfully, God does not expect us to follow him on our own, and he graciously provides us with a fellowship of faithful traveling companions to encourage us and remind us of our mission when we are tempted to give up hope. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer learned firsthand during his years in an underground seminary in Nazi Germany, “the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him ... he needs his brother

solely because ... the Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure."⁴⁶

No one would have known this better than Elijah. While his battle with spiritual heroism was certainly assuaged through the Lord's gracious provision of physical refreshment and spiritual renewal, the struggle was far from over. Ironically, just as Jezebel had raised her voice in protest following Israel's apparent victory at Mt. Carmel, so Elijah was now raising his own voice in protest in the midst of this emerging personal victory at Mt. Horeb. There was a remnant of resistance in the air, even in the face of Yahweh's dramatic self-revelation to the disillusioned prophet, and Elijah felt compelled to repeat his previous complaint:

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. ***I am the only one left***, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Ki 19:14, emphasis mine).

Like so many other spiritual leaders before and after him, Elijah was experiencing the final, and perhaps the most perilous phase in the process of burnout: isolation. The devastating effects of exhaustion and disillusionment had taken their toll, and he was reeling from their impact. Like a prize fighter after a fifteen-round brawl with a heavyweight contender, Elijah was still recovering in his corner of the ring. Bruised and battered from the fight, consumed by the weight of his own wounds, Elijah seemed unable or unwilling to receive the full benefits of Yahweh's restoration and renewal. It would seem that Elijah had become so consumed by his

⁴⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper, 1954), 23.

own weariness and pain that he was blinded to the greater realities around him. His victory over the plague of spiritual heroism would not be complete until he received one last gift from the Lord, the gift of vocational realignment:

The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. *Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel* – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha ... Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah ... he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant (1 Ki 19:15-21, emphasis mine).

Pity parties are never pretty, and they are never fun. They tend to be extremely lonely affairs. Like Elijah, however, even the best of us can become easily entangled in the “what’s-in-it-for-me” trap. Narcissism is one of the unavoidable side-effects of spiritual heroism:

We tend to become so concerned with doing something worthwhile, bringing about changes ... that we often seem to forget that it is not we who redeem, but God ... we then have forgotten that our vocation is not to give visibility to our powers but to God’s ... when our own needs begin to dominate our actions, long-range service becomes difficult and we soon become exhausted, burned out, and even embittered by our efforts.⁴⁷

As Nouwen, McNeil and Morrison remind us, our human need for recognition and acceptance, if not met in and through Christ alone, can easily lead us to a place where we are apt to use our service *to* others as an attempt to satisfy these unmet needs in our own lives. Most of us have “been there” and “done that,” and as the

⁴⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), 121-122.

authors indicate, it always leaves us “exhausted, burned out, and ... embittered.” By God's grace, he allows us see this for what it is, and his kindness leads us to a place of repentance and restoration.

A central part of this restoration process hinges upon our willingness to recognize our deep, God-given need to share our lives and ministries *with* others. Whether we realize it or not, our identity as men and women of God, and as ministers of the gospel, is forged in the fires of friendship. It is through the rubric of relationship that we sift through the complex array of internal and external voices that bombard us every day, each one attempting to re-shape our self-worth and re-define our destiny. And it is in the context of community that we seek to discern the still, small voice of God calling us to embrace or resume our respective vocations. This helps to explain why isolation can become such a destructive force in the lives of spiritual leaders:

Many very generous Christians find themselves increasingly tired and dispirited not so much because the work is hard or the success slight, but because they feel isolated, unsupported, and left alone. People who say, “I wonder if anyone cares what I am doing. I wonder if my superior, my friends at home, or the people who sent me ever think about me, ever pray for me, ever consider me part of their lives,” are in real spiritual danger.

We are able to do many hard things, tolerate many conflicts, overcome many obstacles, and persevere under many pressures, but when we no longer experience ourselves as part of a caring community, we quickly lose faith. This is because faith in God's compassionate presence can never be separated from experiencing God's presence in the community to which we belong ... apart from a vital relationship with a caring community a vital relationship with Christ is not possible.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, we know very little about Elijah's community of origin. The biblical record just does not give us much to work with. He suddenly appears on the scene with this terse introduction: “Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead” (1 Ki

⁴⁸ Ibid., 60.

17:1). Who were his parents? Was he an orphan? Was he ever married? Did he ever have any children? What did he do for a living? Was he respected by his friends and neighbors? Some scholars have speculated that his origins in Gilead may indicate that he was not an Israelite but an Ishmaelite, citing the appointment of a Gentile to such an extraordinary place of leadership as an open rebuke intended to shame the apostate people of Israel.⁴⁹ But this is pure conjecture. All we know for sure is that “Elijah was a human being just like us” (Ja 5:17, NCV), i.e., he was an ordinary person from an ordinary place who lived at an ordinary time in human history. And just like the rest of us, he was endowed by his Creator with an innate need for community (cf. Gen 2:18).

The fact that we have so little information on Elijah’s background may actually help us understand why he was so prone to the perils of isolation. It seems apparent that he was somewhat of a loner and wanderer by nature. While he was not unique among the prophets in this regard, these qualities seem to be accentuated more than most in Elijah’s life and ministry. Even Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet,” had the advantages of priestly parenting (“Hilkiah,” Jer 1:1), reliable assistance (“Baruch,” Jer 32:12; 36:4ff.), and royal support (“Josiah,” 1:2; 22:16). The only ally that is mentioned by name, in Elijah’s case, is Obadiah, a “devout believer in the Lord” who rescued at least 100 of Yahweh’s prophets from certain death while serving as an overseer in Ahab’s palace (1 Ki 18:3-4). This fact in itself underscores the myopic perspective that dominated Elijah’s mindset at Mt. Horeb, where the lonely prophet erroneously lamented that he was “the only one left” (1 Ki 19:10, 14).

⁴⁹Robert Jamieson and A. R. Fausset, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. 1 Ki 17:1. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

While we may not be able to reconstruct Elijah's community of origin with any degree of certainty, it is clear that there are many spiritual leaders today who are struggling with burnout due primarily to a lack of interpersonal intimacy. Based on their work with hundreds of clergy over the years, Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr have concluded that "the experience of intimacy is the core of health and salvation" for every spiritual leader.⁵⁰ Both men are ordained Episcopal priests themselves, and together they have provided over 10,000 hours of spiritual direction and psychotherapy to men and women from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds. In their writings on clergy health, Hands and Fehr continually emphasize the "indispensable function of community in enabling and sustaining the individual's movement of recovery," a process through which "a person who has been emotionally isolated gradually learns to become interdependent with others" instead of "attempting to be god of his or her own universe."⁵¹

Psychologists William Grosch and David Olsen have invested a great deal of time and energy in the study of clergy burnout as well. Like Hands and Fehr, they would affirm the need for greater interpersonal intimacy among spiritual leaders. They would also add that this nagging sense of disconnectedness begs for a deeper understanding of family systems:

The work environment, and particularly the church, can become a type of second family, resulting in even seasoned professionals responding to their work environment in the same ways as they related to their family of origin ... as anxiety increases, old family-of-origin patterns return ... as clergy better understand their needs for validation and praise, as well as understand the way

⁵⁰ Hands and Fehr, xx.

⁵¹ Ibid., 25.

they have internalized old family maps, they then are in a better position to define themselves differently, and in so doing deal with these forces differently. They then are far less likely to burnout.⁵²

For the emerging generation of spiritual leaders who have grown up in homes increasingly devastated by divorce, abuse, neglect and absentee fathers, the impact of loneliness and isolation are even more pronounced. According to the results of a recent study published in the *American Sociological Review*, Americans are lonelier and more isolated than similar studies reported two decades ago. In 1985 the average American had three people in whom they could confide matters important to them. By 2004, that number had dropped to two, and 25 percent of those surveyed had no close confidants at all.⁵³

If this growing experience of loneliness and isolation presents serious challenges for the body of Christ as a whole, then it is fair to say that these challenges are only accentuated for those serving in places of spiritual leadership. As was indicated earlier in this document, the men and women who lead our churches today face a dizzying array of obstacles, and they do so in the midst of a harsh ecclesiastical environment that too often adds insult to injury.

In 2005 a team of clinical psychologists led by Mark McMinn, current director of integration and professor of psychology at George Fox University, conducted a comprehensive review of several recent studies that examined the ways in which pastors

⁵² William N. Grosch and David C. Olsen, "Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 5 (2000): 624-625.

⁵³ Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades." *American Sociological Review* 71 (June 2006): 353-375.

and their spouses attempt to cope with the exceptional stress that accompanies local church ministry. Their findings revealed some clear patterns:

Community resources appear sparse for many clergy. Though clergy desire and need friendships, many have difficulty forming close relationships outside their immediate family because they perceive themselves to be “put on a pedestal” (viewed as paragons of Christian virtue) and “boxed in” by parishioners’ expectations of ways pastors should behave. These expectations can have an isolating effect. For example, a pastor having a difficult day may be expected to pray about it, whereas a surgeon may have a drink or two with his coworkers. Moreover, parishioners may disapprove of pastors who form exclusionary or special relationships with congregation members. As a result, clergy sometimes experience relationships that lack depth and intimacy.

Though a number of respondents in Study 4 mentioned group-based support structures such as networking with other pastors or relating with supervisors at the denominational headquarters, it is important to keep in mind that these support structures are fraught with complexity. Pastors appreciate support from other pastors, but sometimes feel competitive and vulnerable in those relationships. Denominational support can be a blessing to clergy, but many clergy also feel pressured by denominational leaders. Interviewees in Study 5 were inclined to mention these pressures even without being asked to discuss them.⁵⁴

In their conclusion, the authors noted that most pastors have access to a variety of intrapersonal coping resources (prayer, Bible reading, exercise, hobbies, etc.), and many are able to draw strength from their marriage and family relationships, but few of these spiritual leaders mentioned interactions outside of their families (friendships, mentoring, and accountability relationships) as a primary coping resource. Although these conclusions may be sobering, a hopeful note was struck as well in the authors’ assertion that “coaching with pastors is a promising area of clergy-psychologist collaboration” in that it “allows pastors to establish an important collegial relationship with a helping colleague.” It also has practical advantages over supervisory relationships with

⁵⁴ Mark R. McMinn, R. Allen Lish, Pamela D. Trice, Alicia M. Root, Adeline Yap, and Nicole Gilbert. “Care for Pastors: Learning from Clergy and Their Spouses.” *Pastoral Psychology* 53, no. 6 (2005): 567, 577.

denominational officials because “coaches are not in evaluative and decision-making roles with authority over pastors.”⁵⁵

Citing similar projects, such as Michael Jenkins’ *Reflections of the Study of Clergy Burnout*, Sheri Ferguson summarizes that “research has determined that pastors who cultivate relationships with friends, family, colleagues, support systems/mentors, and consultants have lower incidences of depression and burnout.”⁵⁶ A licensed social worker, Ferguson provides therapy and consultation to pastors and their families on a regular basis herself as the executive director of North Alabama United Methodist Pastoral Care and Counseling.

In his book, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, best-selling author and Harvard-trained psychiatrist Scott Peck summarizes the challenges and opportunities before us as we seek ways to reconstruct meaningful relationships in the midst of a splintering society:

Trapped in our tradition of rugged individualism, we are an extraordinarily lonely people ... we are desperately in need of a new ethic of “soft individualism,” an understanding of individualism which teaches that we cannot be truly ourselves until we are able to share freely the things we most have in common: our weakness, our incompleteness, our imperfection, our inadequacy, our sins, our lack of wholeness and self-sufficiency ... it is the kind of softness that allows those necessary barriers, or outlines, of our individual selves to be like permeable membranes, permitting ourselves to seep out and the selves of others to seep in. It is the kind of individualism that acknowledges our interdependence not merely in the intellectual catchwords of the day but in the very depths of our hearts. It is the kind of individualism that makes real community possible.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 579.

⁵⁶ Ferguson, 18.

⁵⁷ Scott M. Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 58.

For Peck, the concept of “soft individualism” is rooted in a formative experience that took place some 35 years before he was able to articulate these words. In the fall of 1952, Peck began his junior year in high school at Friends Seminary, a Quaker prep school on the edge of Greenwich Village in New York City. Despite tremendous diversity within the student body, Peck has no memory of any cliques, outcasts, divisiveness or any unusual pressure to be anything other than himself. What was most memorable about his two years at Friends Seminary, Peck recounts, is that “all the boundaries between people were soft.”⁵⁸

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of the hugely popular *Purpose-Driven Life*, is well known for rattling off memorable one-liners. This is one of his best: “Our strengths breed competition, but our weaknesses build community.” What a profound statement, and what a prophetic word to those of us who serve as leaders in the body of Christ today. As studies have repeatedly indicated, the greatest barrier to community building among most pastors is the fear of judgment. This paralyzing fear is regularly reinforced through competition with our peers, criticism from our supervisors and conflict with our congregations. But when we are willing to confront this fear, stepping forward with courage to confess our weakness, our brokenness, and our neediness before our brothers and sisters in Christ, the power of “soft individualism” is immediately unleashed:

In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous his isolation.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 31.

In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart ... the expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power ... it can no longer tear the fellowship asunder ... the sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him to find true fellowship with the brethren of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's pastoral concerns regarding the "destructive" and potentially "disastrous" impact of isolation are well-founded, according to psychiatrist Gerald May. As director of spiritual guidance at the Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C., May served as a counselor, companion and caring friend for multitudes of spiritual leaders until his death in 2005. An expert on the dynamics of addiction, May has observed that addictive behaviors always thrive best in "hiding" (cf. Gen 3:8, 10). Even when "addicts are no longer able to avoid the truth about their own behavior," May states, "it becomes increasingly important to hide it from other people. Now the addictive behavior becomes more secretive." This, in turn, leads to "an increasing sense of self-alienation, and a growing isolation from other people. There is a sense of harboring a dark secret, the revelation of which would be unbearable."⁶⁰ Once again, this may help to explain why "secret sins" such as eating disorders and Internet pornography have become so rampant within the Christian community in recent days. With the Apostle Paul, Gerald May would affirm that there is ultimately only one way out of this addictive death trap: "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rm 7:24-25).

Similar sentiments are expressed by psychologist Archibald Hart. Having worked extensively with members of the clergy throughout his career, Hart clearly identifies depression as a primary vocational hazard for spiritual leaders. "The pastor's life is

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, 112-113.

⁶⁰ Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 45-46.

marked by a type of loneliness that is peculiar to those who receive their calling from God,” Hart concedes, but this “solitude of sacredness” can quickly degenerate into a “defensive, self-protecting false independence” that can leave these leaders cut off from necessary support systems. Hart warns that “if steps are not deliberately taken to develop these trusting and supportive relationships in each pastorate, the loneliness of leadership responsibilities will lead to isolation and a distortion of reasoning – and this spells depression for many ministers.”⁶¹

Clearly, the road to recovery cannot be traveled alone. We must take public transportation, so to speak. So how can a spiritual leader take intentional steps to avoid the pitfalls of isolation and cultivate genuine community with his or her traveling companions? A basic strategy for vocational realignment might include the following components.

First, we can begin by building a *personal* support team. This means that we must seek to develop close, personal relationships with people we know and trust (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) for mutual encouragement and accountability, or better yet, “edit-ability.”⁶² We must make sure and maintain non-professional friendships, “out of role and responsibility,”⁶³ with people who love and accept us based on our *relationship* with them, not our *performance* for them. We might also consider meeting with a mentor

⁶¹ Archibald D. Hart, *Coping with Depression in the Ministry and Other Helping Professions* (Waco: Word, 1984), 17-18.

⁶² See Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 133-143. According to Myers, “an editor’s function is very different from that of an accountant. While an accountant’s training, job, and passion are rooted in looking for errors and covering all bases, an editor’s training, job, and passion are to help an author toward richer communication – a rich, full voice that is free of encumbrances. Accountants keep records. Editors wipe away errors while keeping the voice of the author.”

⁶³ Hands and Fehr, 68.

or spiritual director on a regular basis – someone we know, trust and respect – who is willing to walk alongside us on our journey as both a companion and guide.

Second, we can build a *professional* support team. We should consult regularly with ministry partners and supervisors to gain the benefits of their wisdom, encouragement and admonition. We should also keep a referral list at our fingertips and use it wisely. We must learn to delegate responsibility and develop leadership teams through shared ministry, and we must continue to build new relationships through participation in ministerial associations, conferences, retreats and continuing education opportunities.

So how many companions does a spiritual leader need in order to be fully engaged in a genuinely Christian community? Some experts, like Howard Hendricks, recommend that every spiritual leader should have three types of people in his or her life: a Paul (pastor), a Barnabas (partner), and a Timothy (protégé).⁶⁴ Others, like Ike Reighard, would argue for four: a Developer (best friend), a Designer (mentor), a Disturber (critic), and a Discerner (accountability partner).⁶⁵ Still others, like Len Sweet, have suggested that there are eleven “indispensable relationships” that we cannot live without.⁶⁶ And then there is Jesus, of course, who chose twelve traveling companions to serve as his apostles, although he personally commissioned another group of 70 ministry associates (or was it 72?), while forging an unusually intimate bond of friendship with an inner circle of just three.

⁶⁴ Gene C. Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1998), 236.

⁶⁵ Ike Reighard, “Four Types of Friends Every Pastor Needs,” <http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/mainpage/0,1701,M%253D200774,00.html> (accessed December 18, 2008).

⁶⁶ See Leonard Sweet, *11: Indispensable Relationships You Can't be Without* (Wheaton: Cook, 2008).

“Two are better than one,” a wise man once said, “if one falls down, his friend can help him up ... though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecc 4:9, 10, 12). Does this mean that two friends constitute a complete community? In a very real and biblical sense, the answer may be, “yes.” Jesus promised that “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Mt 18:20). Based on the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments, then, we can say with confidence that there is always a minimum of three in every authentic expression of Christian community.

This is a beautiful reflection of our triune God himself, in whose image we have each been created (cf. Gen 1:27). According to Genesis, to be created “in the image and likeness of God” is to be formed for a family, based on the reality that God essentially functions as a holy family – Father, Son, Spirit (cf. Gen 1:1). Community is inseparable from godliness because community is inherent in the very nature of God. As Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, once said, “He cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother.”

One could easily argue that Elijah’s life was saved by the redemptive power of community. It certainly extended his ministry career. Crushed by the overwhelming weight of exhaustion, disillusionment and isolation, Elijah ran away from home, as far and as fast as his weary legs could carry him, rushing headlong into the desert with a death wish in hand. What he found there must have surprised him. Like so many others before and after him – Moses, David, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, Antony – it was in the desolation of the desert that Elijah found the essence of life. And it was in the most solitary of surroundings that he found true fellowship.

Touched by a compassionate angel of the Lord, Elijah received the gift of physical refreshment as a remedy for his exhaustion (1 Ki 19:5-8). Moved by the gentle presence of the Lord, Elijah received the gift of spiritual renewal as a remedy for his disillusionment (1 Ki 19:9-14). Attended by a humble servant of the Lord, Elijah received the gift of vocational realignment as a remedy for his isolation (1 Ki 19:15-21). He was not “the only one left” after all.

Apparently, this “arranged marriage” between Elijah and Elisha served them quite well throughout their years of friendship and partnership in ministry. While we do not have any lengthy descriptions of the exact nature of their relationship, it is clear from the biblical record that they developed a deep love and admiration for one another. From their very first encounter, it was evident that Elijah was fully vested in this relationship. Throwing his cloak around his newly appointed apprentice, the prophetic mantle was being officially passed to a new generation of leadership. Although Elijah’s ministry was far from over, it must have been a bittersweet moment for the battle-worn Tishbite, a moment pregnant with both relief and regret. At his young successor’s request, Elijah encouraged Elisha to offer a final farewell to his parents before he left the family farm for good. With newfound tenderness and compassion in his voice, the seasoned ministry veteran consented, “Go back ... what have I done to you?” (1 Ki 19:20). While translators offer varying opinions as to the exact meaning of this expression, it would not be difficult to imagine Elijah, based on his own experience in ministry, granting Elisha’s request with a slight turn of the head as he whispers under his breath, “What have I gotten you into!”

As is so often the case, Elijah surely received as much or more than he invested in this prophetic partnership. After all, it required no small sacrifice for Elisha to accept the invitation to serve a new master. Anyone living in his day that was wealthy enough to own “twelve yoke of oxen” had much to lose, from an earthly perspective. Yet Elisha eagerly embraced his new vocation, having counted the cost, and like Jesus’ first disciples, left everything behind to follow the Lord’s call to ministry in the company of his esteemed mentor. Elisha humbly devoted himself to Elijah as his faithful “attendant,” or personal servant, the one who would “pour water on the hands” of his mentor (1 Ki 19:21; 2 Ki 3:11).

But by far the most poignant expression of Elisha’s affection for Elijah is found in the final chapter of their partnership. As Elisha’s beloved master prepares for his departure from this world, a reality that his prophetic companions see fit to constantly remind the young apprentice, Elisha repeatedly reaffirms his vow of unwavering devotion: “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you” (2 Ki 2:2, 4, 6). As they are about to be separated from each other, Elisha makes one last request, asking Elijah to allow him to “inherit a double portion of your spirit” (i.e., to receive the blessing of the firstborn, in this case, to be a full heir or successor of the prophetic office and gifts of his master),⁶⁷ yet another indication of his utmost respect and admiration for Elijah. Finally, as his friend and partner is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha’s truest sentiments are revealed: “My father! My father! The chariots and horseman of Israel!” And then he was gone (2 Ki 2:12).

⁶⁷ Jamieson and Fausset, 1 Ki 2:9.

The grief must have been overwhelming for Elisha that day. But in the days that followed, it became quite clear to everyone that the apprentice had indeed received a “double portion” of his master’s spirit (2 Ki 2:15). Elisha had received infinitely greater blessing through his relationship with Elijah than any amount of earthly wealth could possibly provide. And what did Elijah receive from Elisha? Hope. Help. Healing. And an enduring legacy that he couldn’t have imagined, even in his wildest dreams. A legacy that is no longer bound by the baggage of spiritual heroism. By the grace of God, Elijah received the gift of “reverse mentoring”:

Tapping the wisdom of the young requires that missional leaders go off road to develop reverse mentoring relationships, a very specific form of friendship in which the junior instructs the senior, not as a replacement for other forms of mentoring but as an essential complement to them.

Reverse mentoring opens up the possibility of a relationship in which both participants simultaneously teach and learn, each making the other an adopted peer. “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Strictly one-way mentoring (upward or downward) resembles iron sharpening wood: all the power is on the side of the person whittling the other into his image. But with iron on both sides, each can be sharpened or conformed into the image of Christ through the work of the Spirit in the relationship.⁶⁸

When we consider the significance of the ministry that has been entrusted to those of us who have been called to serve as spiritual leaders in the body of Christ, we can give thanks for the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1) who have modeled the Christian life before us. This includes all the well-known saints through the ages, of course, but it also includes all of those lesser-known parents, spouses, pastors, professors, mentors, coaches, colleagues and friends who have been so influential in the shaping of our own lives and ministries as well. And we can be encouraged to remember that we, like Elijah and so

⁶⁸ Earl Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures for Missional Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 51.

many others before us, have been given the great privilege and awesome responsibility of “passing the baton”:

The off-road discipline of baton passing ... will be required if we are to develop a cooperative relationship between the generations and set the stage for transition rather than amputation or exodus ... this generation needs fathers and mothers in the faith, who love to hand off more than to hold on because they are able to enjoy success coming to someone other than themselves and because they love mission more than they love power ... those receiving the baton will commit fully to the race if they see older people doing the same, with the goal of forming a partnership that expands everyone’s potential ... [an emerging leader] must become someone’s son in the faith today. An older leader must pray for him, love him, and involve him right now, passing the baton to him and his generation. No one else is coming.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibid., 175-184.

SECTION FOUR: THE PROJECT

Section four of this document will provide the description of a specific proposal for alleviating the impact of burnout among spiritual leaders through the development of a Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College. The primary purpose of this Center would be to provide a place of rest and renewal for church leaders and their families, and to offer a variety of resources designed to encourage and equip these men and women for effective, lifelong spiritual leadership in and through the body of Christ.

As the previous sections of this document have attempted to demonstrate, the call to public ministry is one of the most rewarding AND most demanding vocations of all. Like Elijah, every spiritual leader today needs a “cave,” a place where he or she can retreat from the world and recover from the spiritual battle, a sacred and solitary place where physical refreshment, spiritual renewal and vocational realignment are readily available. The Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College, located on the rolling prairie of south central Kansas, is intended to offer just such a place. The Center is committed to honoring those who work hard on our behalf (cf. 1 Th 5:12) by providing opportunities for these leaders to experience personal and professional renewal in the midst of a supportive Christian community.

The seeds of this Center were originally planted several years ago in a series of informal conversations with Maurice Chandler, former president of Barclay College. As pastoral ministry professor, this author was later asked by President Chandler to serve as a primary resource consultant as the College explored a variety of potential ministry initiatives designed to provide practical support for pastors and other church leaders. Other members of this core group included Jim Beeler and Neil Thompson, former

Barclay administrators, as well as Bruce Hicks and Stan Perisho, former board members and Friends superintendents.

The primary catalyst for this new venture was a shared concern for the personal health and well-being of pastoral leaders and their ability to provide effective leadership for the various congregations which they had been called to serve. Subsequent discussions with other College constituencies (faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, board members and denominational officials) clearly confirmed the need for the development of additional clergy support services. A consensus began to emerge that Barclay was uniquely equipped to address these concerns as a natural outgrowth of its core mission: “To prepare students in a Bible-centered environment for effective Christian life, service and leadership.”

This process was also expedited by the emergence of the “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence” program sponsored by the Lily Foundation, which offered the potential for securing the necessary financial resources for this new initiative. In June of 2002, a grant application¹ was formally filed with the Lily Foundation, requesting approximately \$500,000 over a period of four years (2003-2007) in order to fund the proposed Center. Unfortunately, this application was eventually denied, and the dream was tabled indefinitely as Chandler prepared to retire from his duties as College President.

While these seeds had begun to germinate, they continued to lay dormant over the next few years, snowed under by other more pressing priorities on campus. But like the winter wheat that dominates this region of the Kansas prairie, they were just waiting to emerge at the right time and under the right conditions. That time finally came in the

¹ This “Barclay College Center for Pastoral Renewal Proposal” provides a significant foundation for the material found in this particular section of the document.

spring of 2006, as this author received approval from the College to enroll in the Doctor of Ministry program in Leadership and Spiritual Formation at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. When the time came to choose a topic for the doctoral project, College leaders agreed that the Center would be a perfect fit.

What was originally conceived as a “Barclay College Center for Pastoral Renewal,” with a primary focus on serving pastors from predominantly rural churches in the Great Plains area, was later modified to incorporate a broader target audience of spiritual leaders serving in a wide variety of roles and ministry settings within the Evangelical Friends Church in North America, with an initial focus on recent Barclay graduates. In order to reflect this shift, the name was also changed to “The Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College.”

In attempting to determine the most essential components of such a ministry, input was solicited from a number of different sources. These included Barclay administrators, faculty, staff, students, board members and alumni, as well as ministry colleagues, denominational officials, fellow doctoral students and professors, and other friends and family members. By far the most valuable contribution, however, came from personal contacts with our recent graduates. Through both casual conversations and formal evaluations,² these young men and women provided tremendous insight into the practical challenges currently facing a new generation of emerging spiritual leaders. When considered in light of recent research on the topic of clergy burnout, particular

² See appendix, “Survey of Recent Barclay Graduates Serving in Spiritual Leadership.”

areas of need began to surface. These will become the main priorities during the initial stages of the Center for Spiritual Renewal's growth and development.

On-site Coaching (conferences, retreats and consultations)

As delineated throughout the first three sections of this document, pastors and other church leaders are under extraordinary stress in today's world and are in great need of ways to relieve this stress through the experience of personal and spiritual renewal. Often they may just need to go for a walk, take a day off, get away with God for a personal retreat, or take a family vacation. But as studies conducted by Hoge and Wenger, Hands and Fehr, McMinn and others have consistently shown, many spiritual leaders struggle to implement renewing rituals such as these. For some, this may be due to a simple lack of discipline or an unwillingness to take responsibility for their own personal health and well-being. But for others, there may be a number of mitigating factors that make these life-giving practices especially difficult to apply. For example, they may be part of a congregation or family system in which self-care is considered lazy or selfish. They may be serving in a bi-vocational situation where time demands and financial constraints become problematic. Or they may just simply have no clear understanding of where to begin or how to proceed with self-care because they have never seen it modeled in real life. Or as is too often the case, these leaders may have access to meaningful coping resources within their own church or denomination, but due to the effects of ongoing conflict and competition, they feel unable to take full advantage of them.

The practical implications of this last concern are graphically illustrated by the experience of a fellow ministry colleague, who recently conveyed the following account:

When I was at [a particular church], I had to deal with major issues of depression, despair, burnout, etc. I needed exactly the kind of help your Center for Renewal exists to offer. But about the time I made the decision to “do something about it” and open up to someone in the denominational structure, I was in a meeting with members of the governing board. The chairman of the board that dealt with pension and insurance issues at that time was making a report to the board about expenses related to the health insurance side of things. At one point he looked right at me, smiled, and said, “Some people have had some pretty expensive dental work done.” I smiled back and ignored his comment. But I made a mental note: *If I see a counselor about my problems it could be discussed in front of this board just like my dental repairs.* And so I resolved that if indeed I was going to see anyone, and if I didn't want that broadly known and “chatted about” I would have to make my own arrangements with a counselor without ties to the church and pay for it myself. That's what I did. My income at that time was enough that I could afford over time to pay for that help. But many pastors are not going to have the resources to pay his/her own way for therapy. That was nearly 25 years ago, and thankfully the whole climate of what is “safe” to talk about has improved, but I think there is still a real danger of our “system” inhibiting people from getting the help they need. I'm not sure what safeguards can be built in, or what intermediate steps can be instituted to help pastors feel that they can talk to people who can “help” them without that information getting carried to people who can “hurt” them, but I hope your final proposal will take that into account.

This may be one of the places where a ministry like the Center for Spiritual Renewal can become an unusually valuable resource for spiritual leaders, and for the ministries they serve. As the McMinn study so clearly revealed, “*coaching* with pastors is a promising area of ... collaboration in that it allows pastors to establish an important collegial relationship with a helping colleague.” It also has practical advantages over supervisory relationships with denominational officials because “coaches are not in evaluative and decision-making roles with authority over pastors.”³

Based on its autonomy from a local church or denomination, Barclay College is in a unique position to offer this very type of service. Through the Center for Spiritual Renewal, these services could be made available to church leaders and their families at

³ McMinn et al., 579.

little or no cost. A number of Barclay faculty and staff have extensive training and expertise in clinical psychology, marriage and family therapy and pastoral counseling. Others have been blessed with a wealth of experience in pastoral ministry, youth ministry, music ministry, missions, evangelism, church planting, discipleship and leadership development. Members of the College community could offer coaching, counseling and consultation for spiritual leaders who are facing exhaustion, disillusionment or isolation due to seemingly insurmountable challenges in their respective places of ministry. Just this week, in fact, the following invitation was received from a ministry colleague serving on staff in a nearby church. While the word “coach” is not specifically used, the concept is certainly employed:

I wanted to follow-up with you on my previous e-mail and the conversation we had last week. Over the past several months, a number of experiences and conversations have seemed to point to a need for our staff to be more intentional in growing in our relationships with one another – especially in regard to our roles, leadership styles, and working together for more effective ministry to our church community. Our church governing board has been supportive of the idea of utilizing a facilitator to help guide us as a staff through some steps toward improving our understanding of ourselves and how to function better together. Issues of personality types, leadership styles, communication patterns, and even, spiritual giftedness and personal strengths all seems to be significant to the big picture.

We're not quite sure where to begin but would like to move forward with this after the first of the year. From past experience, I am familiar with several different tools that may or may not be helpful (DISC personality profile, Myer's-Briggs, gifts inventories, etc.). I also understand that tools rarely lead to significant change (personal or corporate) in and of themselves. Of more importance is finding a person who can guide/direct us through the conversations to see what work God might be trying to do in us. I think what we need is to find someone willing and able to wear several hats – counselor, spiritual director, maybe pastor – to help us as a staff move toward more life-giving ministry together.

Another opportunity for ministry is clearly evident in the area of continuing education. In the Survey of Recent Barclay Graduates, respondents provided a wide

range of suggestions in response to an invitation to “list courses you would have taken to better prepare yourself if the College had offered them (or had offered them in your major).” The most common requests for additional training fell into two main categories: leadership and spiritual formation. The fact that at least half of these recent Barclay graduates indicated a genuine interest in pursuing additional learning opportunities if they were offered suggests the likelihood that there would be an enthusiastic response to such offerings.

Conferences and retreats often provide an ideal environment for these kinds of personal and professional growth experiences. And so the very first official event sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Renewal was a guided retreat, held on the Barclay campus in May of 2008. This weekend retreat was designed to provide an opportunity for participants to both learn and practice life-giving, renewing rituals (diet, exercise, sleep and Sabbath rest) in the context of a circle of supportive peers. Extensive time and space was also set aside for unprogrammed periods of solitude, silence and recreational activity. Based on the overwhelmingly positive response that was expressed in the retreat evaluations,⁴ another guided retreat sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Renewal has been scheduled for May of 2009 in cooperation with two of our closest denominational partners (Evangelical Friends Church-Mid America and Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting of the Friends Church). Similar retreats have also been scheduled during the coming year with members of the Kiowa County Ministerial Alliance and youth leaders from the Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region.

⁴ See appendix, “Evaluation of Center for Spiritual Renewal Guided Retreat.”

Online Community (website and blog)

Spiritual formation and discipleship are at the core of our identity at Barclay College. Barclay's capacity for cultivating an environment that is especially conducive to spiritual formation and discipleship is based in large part on the unusual opportunities for community building that are available on this small, close-knit campus, with an enrollment of just over 125 students. Visitors to our campus often testify to the unusual level of authenticity and spiritual vitality at Barclay. There is really only one down side to this extraordinary blessing: it is extremely difficult to reproduce following graduation.

If you were to speak with students who have graduated from Barclay in recent years, one of the main things you would likely hear over and over again is how hard it has been for them to find and/or build the type of community that they experienced during their time in college. While it would be unrealistic to believe that any experience can or should be duplicated, the formation of authentic, Christ-centered community is at the very heart of the New Testament church and is intended to be an ongoing reality for every disciple of Jesus (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

Based on the findings of the Survey of Recent Barclay Graduates, we can be thankful that most of these men and women are not currently experiencing unusually high levels of stress caused by spiritual or theological doubts, physical or mental health problems, inadequate finances, behavioral addictions, or interpersonal conflicts. However, the majority of these leaders are clearly feeling considerable pressure created by family problems, unrealistic expectations, excessive time demands, a nagging sense of powerlessness and the huge weight of responsibility that accompanies every leadership

role in the church. Of these, the issue of time demands was rated most stressful by the respondents.

As Wells⁵ and Ferguson⁶ would remind us, these excessive time demands and the level of stress they produce can easily lead to a sense of increasing exhaustion, disillusionment and isolation among spiritual leaders. When combined with inadequate self-care, it is not hard to understand how even the healthiest among us can quickly lose perspective and, like Elijah, succumb to the perils of narcissism, depression and self-protection. We were created for community, and we must take intentional steps to forge ongoing friendships with our brothers and sisters in Christ if we hope to stay personally and professionally fit.

Of course, our increasingly complex society often fights against the intimacy we so desperately need as we are constantly tempted to consume every electronic gadget at our disposal. But if technology has the potential to work *against* our efforts at building community, it certainly has the potential to work *for* us as well. One of the best examples of this is the recent surge in participation in online communities such as MySpace and Facebook, as well as a wide variety of other web-based discussion forums and chat rooms. This author's own life and ministry, in fact, have been deeply enriched in recent years through participation in online conversations with other members of Cohorts H and I at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. When supplemented by occasional face-to-face interaction, such web-enhanced relationships can become genuinely meaningful and mutually supportive. This is especially important for spiritual leaders who are serving in

⁵ Wells, 2-3.

⁶ Ferguson, 16.

unusually remote locations, which includes many rural communities and most foreign mission fields.

With this in mind, the Center for Spiritual Renewal will utilize the Internet as a primary system for cultivating community among its constituents. A website will be created to serve as the central depository for a wide variety of resources designed to encourage and equip spiritual leaders for personal and professional growth. Specific web pages will provide information on spiritual retreats, spiritual direction, the relationship between spiritual vitality and physical fitness, and links to other recommended resources for personal and professional renewal. A blog will also be created, providing additional opportunities to foster ongoing friendships and community development among spiritual leaders from across the country and around the world.

Ongoing Companionship (mentoring, counseling and spiritual direction)

This brings us to the final and most pressing concern that emerges from the Survey of Recent Graduates. Although just over half (56%) of the respondents indicated that they have a mentor, this leaves almost one half (44%) without one. What's more, of those who do have a mentor, less than half meet with them on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly or quarterly). The same could be said of the other spiritual leaders with whom these graduates said they have a high-trust relationship, again, only half of them meeting together on a regular basis. It should not be surprising, then, to discover that the majority of these men and women reported that the support they actually received from their mentor or spiritual director during the last six months was only "slightly" or "not at all" helpful.

These figures are supported by many of the personal comments which appear at the end of this survey. Our female graduates, in particular, spoke passionately to this issue. As one leader put it, “It is difficult to be a woman in ministry for me precisely because there are few options for mentors.” Or as another remarked, for a “young, single woman in ministry ... support is little to non-existent.” One of our male graduates also commented on this topic, suggesting that “a mentor or spiritual director could be an integral part of developing good spiritual leaders in the future.”

Such comments only serve to underscore the reality that we cannot address these personal and professional challenges alone. We may know what adjustments we need to make, and we may even know how to make them, but we are all extremely adept at avoiding change at all costs. We need help. We need the support and accountability of others who care enough to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), especially when that truth hurts. We need someone to walk with us as we attempt to take greater responsibility for our own lives and the lives of others we have been called to lead. And we need someone to remind us each step of the way that we never walk alone, for we have a God who pursues us with a relentless and everlasting love, regardless of our daily performance or job approval ratings (cf. Rm 8:37-39).

This God has become our “Immanuel,” the One who promises to be “with us” to the very end of the age (Mt 28:20). This is also the God who looked over his creation at the very beginning and pronounced it all “good.” Everything, that is, but one thing: “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). So, as he did for Adam, God has created “suitable helpers” for each one of us. This certainly includes our spouse if we are married, but we also need others whom we know and trust who can stand outside of the

day-to-day routine of life and offer us their unique perspective, experience, guidance and companionship. We need reliable mentors in our lives.

With this in mind, those who lead the Center for Spiritual Renewal will make it their number one priority to offer ongoing personal support and encouragement to those they serve. Initially, the majority of this mentoring and spiritual direction will be provided by the Center's director and by other Barclay faculty and staff through direct, personal contact. Over time, however, it will be essential to develop a network of mentors and spiritual directors who can meet with the Center's constituents face-to-face in their own ministry contexts. The Center's main role will then be to facilitate ongoing mentoring and spiritual direction by connecting emerging leaders with other reliable men and women in their area who are willing to invest in the growth and development of our next generation of Christian disciple-makers (cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

But perhaps the most powerful, and most neglected form of companionship we can offer to our fellow brothers and sisters is the ministry of prayer. Moses constantly interceded for the people of Israel, most of whom turned against him at some point, including his own sister (Nu 12:13). When the Israelites were wavering in their faith yet again following their conquest and occupation of the Promised Land, they pleaded for their beloved mentor and guide, Samuel, to intercede for them, to which he replied, "far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sa 12:23). And when Peter was preparing to face his darkest hour, when he would repeatedly deny all loyalties to the One he loved, Jesus reassured him with these words: "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:32).

God only knows how many of us, like Peter, have been rescued from our own ruin and restored to ministry through the power of intercessory prayer. There is no doubt that prayer has sustained the life and ministry of this author, who now counts it a high privilege to engage in regular, strategic intercession on behalf of both established and emerging church leaders with whom he is associated. Through the Center for Spiritual Renewal, the ministry of intercessory prayer on behalf of our spiritual leaders will be continually encouraged and fostered.

It seems clear that there are continuing opportunities to strengthen and expand Barclay's ministry to those spiritual leaders who are serving us so well in the various types of ministry for which God has uniquely called and equipped them. The most obvious place to begin is to consider any ways we might be able to build on the solid foundation of community life at Barclay in order to facilitate an even more strategic ministry of mentoring and spiritual direction for our church leaders and their families. We must do all we can to provide them with the support they need to exercise their unique, God-given gifts and callings in the midst of an increasingly hostile ministry environment. By God's grace, the Center for Spiritual Renewal will become an instrument through which the life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit can flow into the hearts and souls of our spiritual leaders, enabling them to "soar on wings like eagles," to "run and not grow weary," and to "walk and not faint" (Is 40:31).

SECTION FIVE: PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Project Description

- According to recent studies, one out of every four pastors is experiencing burnout today,¹ and approximately 40% of pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone.² Although many spiritual leaders are functioning quite well in their ministries today, many others are leaving ministry at an alarming rate due to an extraordinary level of job-related stress and burnout.
- My project will be the development of a Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College. The primary purpose of this Center for Spiritual Renewal would be to provide a place of rest and renewal for church leaders and their families, and to offer a variety of resources designed to enhance personal and professional growth and better equip men and women for lifelong spiritual leadership within the body of Christ.

Audience

- The primary target audience for the project itself will be those spiritual leaders (pastors, missionaries, youth workers, music ministers, etc.) who are currently serving within the Evangelical Friends Church International-North America (EFCI-NA), with an initial focus on those who are recent graduates of Barclay College.

¹ Frank Green, class notes from *DMIN 511 Spirituality and Personality*, October 24, 2006.

² London and Wiseman, 25.

- Every spiritual leader needs a place where he or she can retreat from the world and recover from the spiritual battle, a sacred and solitary place where physical rest, spiritual renewal and vocational realignment are readily available. The Center for Spiritual Renewal is intended to provide just such an environment for Friends leaders from around the country.
- Through participation in on-site coaching (conferences, retreats and consultations), online community (website and blog) and ongoing companionship (mentoring, counseling and spiritual direction), leaders will have opportunities to experience personal and professional renewal in the context of a supportive, Christian community.

Goals and Strategies

- The main goal for this project is to help spiritual leaders reduce and/or manage work-related stress in order to prevent burnout and sustain long-term ministry.
- In order to test the validity of this project a focus group of recent Barclay College graduates will be invited to participate in a sample retreat on campus, supplemented by an invitation to participate in an online discussion forum through the College website.
- The success of this project will be measured initially by the level of interest received from this focus group, and from feedback received following the sample retreat and online experience.
- If the program is deemed to be successful, additional staff will eventually be needed to provide ongoing leadership and oversight. This will be arranged in cooperation with the Barclay College administration.

Project Scope and Content

- The full details of this project will be published in print, with the most critical components posted on a Center for Spiritual Renewal website in order to promote this new ministry initiative as widely as possible and solicit appropriate feedback.
- The project will require access to the necessary electronic equipment and the assistance of the College network administrator in the management of online components.

Project Skill-set Assessment

- The project will require skills in writing, editing and organizing printed material in an efficient and timely manner, as well as communicating this information verbally to a variety of College constituents. It will also require the ability to use appropriate technology required for publishing this material online in an electronic format.
- This author feels well-equipped for the written and verbal aspects of the project. While possessing substantial familiarity with the required electronic resources, he will be relying heavily on the College network administrator for additional assistance.

Budget

- An initial, “sample” retreat sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Renewal will be completely underwritten by Barclay College through a special conference fund. This retreat will be offered completely free of cost and will be limited to the first

20 registrants. The total cost for this retreat will be approximately \$1,500.

Subsequent retreats will be funded primarily through participant registration fees.

- The Center for Spiritual Renewal website and blog is provided at no cost through cooperation with Barclay College and Google.
- Mentoring, counseling and spiritual direction will be provided by current Barclay faculty and staff at no charge to participants.

Promotion

- The ministries offered by the Center for Spiritual Renewal will be promoted most widely through the use of the website and blog, which can be accessed by almost anyone at any time from virtually any place in the world that has Internet access.
- Other promotional tools will include personal letters, phone calls, emails and informal conversations with interested constituents.

Standards of Publication

- The Center for Spiritual Renewal website (<http://www.csr.barclaycollege.edu>) is operated according to the standards of publication which have been established by Barclay College.
- The Center for Spiritual Renewal blog (<http://www.bearsdenonline.blogspot.com>) is operated according to the standards of publication which have been established by Google.

Evaluation and Ongoing Development

- Written evaluations will be conducted following each on-site event (conference, retreat, consultation) sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Renewal.

- Participation in online community (website and blog) operated by the Center for Spiritual Renewal will be tracked using Google Analytics.
- Engagement in ongoing companionship (mentoring, counseling and spiritual direction) facilitated by the Center for Spiritual Renewal will be monitored through regular reports from caregivers and continuing conversations with participants.

SECTION SIX: POSTSCRIPT

Ministry is hard. Just ask any recent Bible college or seminary graduate. Like those who are newly married, the first seven years or so can make it or break it for those who enter the arena of spiritual leadership in the body of Christ. For most of these young men and women, the honeymoon is relatively short and the disillusionment stage which follows can be acutely painful. Those who are able to find the grace and strength to survive these early trials typically find new joy in the journey and discover an even greater sense of fulfillment in their service to Christ and his church. Sustained by this newfound reality, these maturing spiritual leaders recognize that blessing often comes through brokenness. Ministry is still just as hard, of course, but now it is also exceedingly good.

For those of us who are called to prepare these emerging leaders for the work to which God has called them, it often feels a lot like premarital counseling. You do your best to equip them with the most accurate and reliable information available, you try to provide an open and honest forum where they can discuss the questions that arise along the way, you offer examples from your own experience that you hope will demonstrate the validity of these truths, you give them as many opportunities as possible to put these lessons into practice, and you pray like crazy! The fact is, however, that no matter how hard you try to prepare these men and women for their future marriages (or ministries), you do so with the constant awareness that it will never be enough. Like everything else in life, there is no substitute for the real thing. The proof really is in the pudding!

If the Survey of Recent Barclay Graduates is any indication, it would seem apparent that there is reason to have great hope for this emerging generation of spiritual

leaders. Hopefully, this also signifies that we as a College community are on the right track as we seek to fulfill our mission to “prepare students in a Bible-centered environment for effective Christian life, service and leadership.” If so, we can praise God for the unspeakable privilege of having a part in the vital work that is being done in and through these young men and women as they contribute to the fulfillment of the Great Commission around the world.

But what about those stories of struggling, young leaders that were highlighted at the beginning of this document? What ever happened to them? Their stories are still being written, of course, but if recent reports are any indication, there is still hope for a happy ending.

Case Study #1 (young pastor serving in remote, rural church setting):

Our experiences here in [our new location] caused us to look back at what happened at [our former place of ministry]. The only reason we ran was because there were a few people in the church that made things very difficult for us. I talked about wanting to be in a true church, but that was just a cover for my immature motives. I remember the day we decided to quit. My wife came home from a baby shower and was disgusted at how she was treated, I was fed up and decided to leave. I would say that only if that day hadn't happened then all would be fine, however it was bound to happen sooner or later.

My wife and I began to realize that we weren't in God's will here in [our new location] after several events. I felt moved by the Spirit to read the Exodus story. I remember reading Exodus 14:15 and from that time I set my mind towards God parting the Red Sea in front of us. The next week I read Isaiah 30 and felt sick to my stomach because it described my situation and what we had done. We had fled for refuge just like the Israelites. Verse 15 says that in repentance and rest we would find salvation and strength. Yet we would have none of it. The Israelites fled, but their pursuers were quicker than they were. The problems we had in [our previous location] just simply beat us down here. I realized I had handled things all wrong, I needed to repent from my resentment and just rest in the Lord. I didn't need to leave. I wouldn't listen, thus God allowed us to come to a place where we would have to live that out ... but we know that God is in all this chaos. God knew we couldn't go on the way that we were so He crushed us.

I usually try to avoid difficult times. I was comforted by the fact that God told the Israelites to camp directly in front of the Red Sea, a location where they would certainly have to face the Egyptians. The Israelites could have avoided the difficult time, but they didn't – they simply surrendered. That is what I did and God spoke again. Later that day a young man came into the business office where I work and struck up a deep conversation with a young lady. She asked his name and he said his name was Promise. That word meant a lot to me, I knew I was headed for a difficult time but God was the one directing it.

My wife and I feel like we are at the Red Sea waiting for our Exodus. Just a couple of weeks ago we dropped our son off at children's church and looked up and there was a giant mural of Moses parting the Red Sea; that was a huge comfort. The number one thing we have learned is that we need to die to ourselves and do things God's way. We were never going to accomplish anything as long as we were dominated by hurt feelings and unforgiveness.

Case Study #2 (youth pastor serving on his first tour of duty in the local church):

I could not remember the last time I had felt and known and experienced God actually speaking to and answering prayer in any way. Well, God answered. Here's how it happened. My wife and I went on a significant walk together and just gave up to trust God with whatever he was doing. It was almost as if God was guiding our conversation into his will. We talked about me and the youth ministry and how things were going and where I was at. I felt like God was releasing me from being youth pastor.

As I shared with my wife about this and as we have prayed together over the past few weeks we have known a new sense of life, joy, and peace. At this point, we have no new direction. I have learned a lot about myself. I have learned that God uses me and I am much stronger as a support leader rather than being a head leader. I am really open to a lot of different directions right now. I am really trying to leave all doors open to God right now and asking him to show us clearly what he would have us do in the next step. Please pray for us to trust well and listen and obey well. And please pray for God's continued guidance.

At some level, these two case studies are representative of the experiences of most of our young church leaders, and many of our old ones as well. And they only serve to point out the genuine need for practicing the very same things that have been highlighted in this document – rest, repentance, prayer, meditation on Scripture, companionship, etc. In other words, if spiritual leaders have any hope of avoiding burnout and sustaining

long-term ministry in and through the body of Christ, they will need heavy doses of personal and professional renewal, in the context of a supportive Christian community.

These are the very same things that we are committed to supporting at the Center for Spiritual Renewal. By providing opportunities to experience physical refreshment, spiritual renewal and vocational realignment, our goal is to expose the perils of spiritual heroism and to alleviate the impact of exhaustion, disillusionment and isolation in the lives of our spiritual leaders so that they can sustain effective, lifelong ministry in and through the body of Christ.

Based on early returns, it would seem that we may be on to something here. Our first guided retreat was very well-received, and three additional retreats have been scheduled so far for the coming year. Requests have been increasing for on-site coaching and consultation as well. Our website and blog have been receiving steady traffic in the first few months since their inception. Opportunities for mentoring and spiritual direction have never been greater.

And yet we all recognize that there is much more work to be done. With Jesus, we affirm that the harvest continues to be plentiful, but the workers are still far too few (Mt 9:37). As this document has attempted to show, the continuing shortage of Christian workers in the world today is only exacerbated by the premature departure of so many church leaders from their God-given ministries. So while we pray that new workers will be “raised up” (called and sent) for the Lord’s harvest field, we also pray that ministries like the Center for Spiritual Renewal will continue to be used by God to “raise up” (restore and sustain) more and more of these workers for the ministries that God has prepared for them. With the Apostle Paul, we confess that we have not already obtained

all of this, and we have not yet been made perfect, but this one thing we do: “Forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead, [we] press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Php 3:13-14).

Clearly, the best is yet to come!

Survey of Recent Barclay College Graduates Serving in Spiritual Leadership

[Adapted from a survey conducted by Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, published by the Alban Institute in the May/June 2002 issue of *Congregations*]

Number of surveys distributed	30
Number of surveys returned	17
Response rate	57%

1. Below is a list of some sources of support for spiritual leaders. In the last six months, how helpful have these been to you in your ministry?

	Very	Significantly	Slightly	Not at all	NA
a. Members or groups in your congregation	23%	41%	29%	6%	0%
b. Leaders in your congregation	29%	35%	23%	6%	0%
c. Colleagues in ministry	47%	29%	23%	0%	0%
d. Ministerial support group	23%	18%	18%	12%	29%
e. Spouse or close family member	59%	18%	6%	0%	18%
f. Counselor, psychiatrist, or therapist	6%	0%	18%	23%	53%
g. Denominational/organizational official	0%	12%	53%	6%	29%
h. Denominational/organizational committee	0%	6%	29%	29%	29%
i. Mentor	12%	29%	23%	6%	29%
j. Spiritual director	18%	12%	23%	6%	41%
k. Friend outside the congregation	18%	35%	35%	0%	12%

l. Other: *Out of town pastor*

2. Do you have a mentor? 56% Yes 44% No (Skip to question #5)

3. How frequently do you meet with your mentor?

11% Weekly 11% Bi-weekly 22% Monthly 0% Quarterly 56% As needed

4. Please check the topics that you discuss most often with your mentor. (Check **all** that apply.)

78% Discipleship and spiritual formation

78% Interpersonal relationships

67% Leadership and administration

56% Personal growth and development issues

44% Pastoral care and counseling

44% Youth and children's ministries

44% Family life

44% Theological topics

33% Preaching and teaching

33% Outreach and evangelism

33% The relationship between the church and the community

11% Music and worship ministries

11% Financial issues

Other: *We discuss what's going on in my life as a whole and ministry opportunities that arise.*

5. Are there other spiritual leaders with whom you have a high-trust relationship?

71% Yes

29% No (Skip to question #8)

6. With how many other spiritual leaders do you have high-trust relationships? 4

7. How frequently do you have high-trust conversations with these spiritual leaders?

25% Weekly

17% Bi-weekly

8% Monthly

8% Quarterly

42% As needed

8. What is your trust level with your supervisor?

12% Low

35% Medium

41% High

0% Varies

12% NA

9. What is your trust level with other paid staff in your congregation/ministry organization?

12% Low

18% Medium

18% High

0% Varies

53% NA

10. To what extent have you used the following methods to build trust in your congregation/organization?

	Much	Some	Little	Never
a. Been vulnerable or shared emotions	29%	41%	29%	0%
b. Shared personal goals, hopes, or dreams	53%	35%	12%	0%
c. Created common goals	41%	41%	12%	6%
d. Asked for, and acted on, corrective feedback	35%	47%	12%	6%
e. Acknowledged personal flaws or weaknesses	29%	53%	12%	6%
f. Shared my personal story	35%	53%	12%	0%
g. Gave corrective feedback	18%	65%	18%	6%
h. Invited others to share their personal stories	41%	35%	18%	6%

11. How often do the following situations create stress in your life?

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
a. Too many demands on my time	53%	29%	18%	0%
b. Feelings of powerlessness in my work	18%	59%	23%	0%
c. Inadequate compensation or finances	0%	41%	23%	35%
d. Personal or family situations	18%	47%	35%	0%

e. Unrealistic or unclear expectations for my work	23%	41%	23%	12%
f. Criticism of me and what I have done	6%	29%	41%	23%
g. Doubts about spiritual/theological beliefs	0%	29%	35%	35%
h. Feeling drained in fulfilling my functions	0%	59%	29%	12%
i. Physical or mental health problems	0%	6%	59%	35%
j. Dealing with personal grief and loss	0%	23%	35%	41%
k. Problems I have with addictions	0%	6%	18%	76%
l. Interpersonal conflicts with church members	6%	35%	23%	35%

m. Other stress situations: *Seriousness of my responsibilities; fear of failure; time constraints; my expectations and the imagined expectations of others; God's timing; being told I was fired then not fired*

12. In the past week, how often have you . . .

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
a. Felt depressed	0%	39%	53%	28%
b. Felt sad	0%	22%	50%	28%
c. Had crying spells	6%	11%	17%	67%
d. Felt you could not shake off the blues	0%	11%	17%	67%
e. Not felt like eating or had a poor appetite	6%	23%	12%	59%
f. Slept restlessly	6%	35%	29%	29%
g. Felt you could not get going	0%	29%	41%	29%
h. Felt that everything you did was an effort	6%	29%	23%	41%
i. Seriously considered quitting your job	0%	0%	12%	88%
j. Other: <i>Depends on the week. I have great weeks and hard weeks as well as times of the year.</i>				

13. What do you currently do to take care of your physical health? (Check **all** that apply.)

41% Take full vacation time allotted 65% Get adequate amount of sleep

29% Get regular dental checkups 24% Get regular physical checkups

47% Eat a balanced diet 53% Manage my weight

24% Take vitamins

82% Exercise regularly (at least weekly) 65% Take a full day off weekly

59% Participate in personal hobbies/leisure time activities

Other: *Try to relax when time allows; I try to give myself time to care for myself since I just had a baby; hunting and fishing with my brother and dad, golf with dad, home life and food with mom and sisters; trust the Lord, make sure and laugh with my kids, rebuke fear*

14. What time management techniques do you currently use? (Check ***all*** that apply.)

- 76% Use calendar, planner, or computer methods for scheduling
- 65% Schedule and keep personal/family commitments
- 53% Disciplined or scheduled times for prayer and devotional reading
- 47% Disciplined or scheduled times for study and sermon/lesson preparation
- 47% Resist the temptation to procrastinate
- 41% Saying no to non-essential requests to serve
- 41% Ask yourself "Who else could handle this?" and make sure to delegate promptly
- 35% Scheduled and maintain regular office hours
- 35% Personal and professional goal setting
- 23% Establish clear expectations with governing board and communicate those publicly
- 12% Use "two-thirds/one third" model (work only two of three waking segments of day)
- 12% Calls screened by secretary
- 6% Review and assess time usage with governing board/supervisor/support group
- 0% Use of denominational/organizational calendar
- 0% Limit counseling hours by referring people to other resources when appropriate

Other: *Working on several of these areas; I'm extremely free right now, and I really hate over-scheduling my life, however, I'll schedule more if I find I'm not meeting my goals*

15. Please indicate how often you have utilized the following in your personal or professional development.

	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
a. Bible study/exegesis for sermon/lesson preparation	63%	31%	6%	0%
b. Devotional/spiritual reading for personal enrichment	65%	35%	0%	0%
c. Listening and responding to people's needs	65%	29%	6%	0%
d. Creating clear, articulated goals for my congregation	18%	41%	18%	23%
e. Developing my interpersonal skills	35%	47%	18%	0%
f. Developing my administrative ability	41%	29%	18%	12%
g. Learning/actively using visionary/leadership skills	29%	41%	23%	6%
h. Learning/actively using conflict resolution skills	29%	35%	35%	0%
i. Prayer and meditation	65%	29%	6%	0%
j. Journaling	12%	35%	29%	23%
k. Solitude and silence/spiritual retreats	18%	35%	41%	6%
l. Fasting	12%	23%	35%	29%
m. Confession	6%	59%	29%	6%

n. Worship	88%	6%	6%	0%
o. Participation in small group fellowship	35%	23%	23%	18%
p. Other: <i>Read and listen to other sermons</i>				

16. When defining success as a spiritual leader, how important do you consider each of the following?

	Very	Significantly	Slightly	Not at All	NA
a. Number of new participants	6%	12%	65%	12%	6%
b. Personally leading someone to Christ	35%	29%	29%	6%	0%
c. Affirmative feedback from participants	16%	65%	23%	6%	0%
d. Increased giving by church participants	18%	6%	53%	6%	18%
e. Affirmative feedback from persons given care	6%	56%	19%	6%	13%
f. Affirmative feedback from students/disciples	0%	76%	18%	0%	6%
g. Affirmative feedback from counselees	0%	41%	23%	12%	23%
h. Recognition for community work	0%	0%	59%	35%	6%
i. Serving on local committees or boards	6%	0%	41%	29%	23%
j. Serving the denomination/organization	6%	18%	41%	18%	18%
k. Advances in organizational goals	0%	29%	53%	12%	6%
l. Multiplication of ministers/ministries	6%	41%	41%	0%	12%
m. Helping others discover/exercise spiritual gifts	71%	23%	0%	0%	6%
n. Affirmative feedback from colleagues	12%	71%	18%	0%	0%
o. Affirmative feedback from family and friends	23%	53%	23%	0%	0%

p. Other: *Affirmative feedback from the Holy Spirit; growth – kids becoming more like Christ, leading them in the journey, the feedback and recognition is not the goal but a positive indicator.*

17. Which of the following have you done to help the people you are leading **identify** their personal gifts and callings? (Check **all** that apply.)

- 88% Prayed for discernment
- 71% Provided one-to-one counseling
- 65% Preached and/or taught on the topic of personal gifts and callings
- 35% Held study groups, classes, workshops or seminars on this topic
- 18% Worked with the church nominating committee
- 6% Encouraged people to engage in career guidance or assessment
- 6% Used denominational/organizational materials on spiritual gifts
- Other: *Solicited guidance from the Holy Spirit*

18. In the past year, have you done any of the following to **empower** others to exercise their gifts and callings? (Check **all** that apply.)

65% Gave both affirmative and corrective feedback

59% Discussed the issue one-to-one with officers, teachers, or staff

53% Tailored” jobs to fit the gifts of the person

47% Provided coaching and mentoring for volunteers

41% Held discussions with people to discover what they are learning from their experience

23% Negotiated performance standards and communicated clear expectations

23% Let people resign when there was not a “fit”; encouraged people who need to resign to do so

Other: *Offered/asked people to help me with a retreat in ways that fit their gifts*

19. How satisfied are you in your current position?

50% Very satisfied

44% Somewhat satisfied

6% Somewhat dissatisfied

0% Very dissatisfied

20. Do you feel that Barclay College did a good job of preparing you for ministry?

94% Yes

0% No

6% Not sure

21. To what extent did your college education at Barclay prepare you in each of the following areas?

	Great	Some	Little	Not at All
a. Leadership and administration	35%	65%	0%	0%
b. Outreach and evangelism	29%	59%	12%	0%
c. Spiritual formation and discipleship	82%	18%	0%	0%
d. Stewardship and social justice	12%	53%	35%	0%
e. Pastoral care and counseling	76%	18%	6%	0%
f. Preaching and teaching	76%	18%	6%	0%
g. Biblical studies	82%	12%	6%	0%
h. Theological reflection	59%	35%	6%	0%
i. Historical understanding of the church	41%	35%	18%	6%
j. Cross-cultural ministries and world missions	39%	50%	11%	0%
k. Understanding ethical issues facing Christians	18%	47%	35%	0%
l. Worship and music ministry	47%	41%	0%	12%

22. Please list courses you would have taken to better prepare yourself if the College had offered them:

18% Leadership (leadership development, emerging church, church administration, vision casting, church conflict management, starting new ministries)

18% Spiritual formation (spiritual formation and discipleship, spiritual formation II, mentoring, spiritual warfare, spiritual leadership, advanced discipleship training for new believers)

15% Personal growth (marriage, minister's spouse, personal time management and goal setting, how to manage personal finances, developing a relationship with pastoral staff)

15% Pastoral ministries (homiletics x 3, counseling x 2)

15% Church and society (Christianity and culture, God and government, church history, social justice x 2)

12% Outreach (advanced personal evangelism seminars, church planting, church growth and development, community outreach)

23. If the College offered these courses today as continuing education, would you take one or more of them?

47% Yes

7% No

47% Not sure

24. Please indicate if you have participated in any of the following growth opportunities during the last two years (Check *all* that apply).

100% Stayed in touch with colleagues in ministry to find out what they are doing

61% Attended conferences or workshops sponsored by church and parachurch organizations

33% Attended continuing education events or conferences at Barclay or another Christian college/seminary

Other: *Continuing education programs; seminary degree; reading, videos*

25. How many close, personal relationships did you develop while you were at Barclay? 7-8

26. How many of these have you sustained during your time in professional ministry? 5-6

27. How many close, personal relationships have you developed since leaving Barclay? 3

28. How many of those have you sustained since leaving Barclay? 2

29. Which of the following best describes your current employment?

30% Youth Pastor

20% Missionary

15% Solo Pastor

10% Music Pastor

10% Parachurch Leader

5% Associate Pastor

0% Senior Pastor

0% Teacher

0% Children's Pastor

10% Other (specify): *Apologetics ministry; pastor's spouse*

30. How many years were you, or have you been, serving in spiritual leadership on a professional level?

18% Less than one year	35% One to three years	35% Four to six years
12% Seven to ten years	0% More than ten years	

31. Please list any additional degrees you have completed (Check *all* that apply and list the specific degree.)

Bachelor's Degree: *One student is finishing a BA in Philosophy of Religion*

Master's Degree: *Two students are pursuing MA's; three students are pursuing MDiv's*

Doctoral Degree: *None*

Other: *None*

32. Are you: 24% Female 76% Male

33. What is your race or origin? (Check *all* that apply.)

100% Caucasian	0% African American	0% Native American
0% Asian/Pacific Islander	0% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	
Other (please specify): <i>None</i>		

34. What is your age?

35% Less than 25	47% 25 – 39	18% 40 – 49	0% 50 – 59	0% 60 or older
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35. Please use the space below for additional comments regarding the topics covered in this form.

- *Thank you for putting this together, it helps me to think of areas where I need to improve.*
- *Overall, Barclay College did a good job of preparing me for full-time ministry, as much as anyone can ever be prepared for it. I learned and grew in many ways while I was at Barclay.*
- *It would be nice if new students were given the opportunity or encouraged to find a mentor or spiritual director if they did not have one already. And, while I don't have an official mentor or an official spiritual director, there are several men I do look to for direction and greatly value their opinions. Solid, effective spiritual formation requires a solid foundation. A mentor or spiritual director could be an integral part of developing good spiritual leaders in the future. We need to use our "Peter's" and "Paul's" to form our "Timothy's" and "John Mark's".*
- *I seriously think a class or forum on issues relating to being the spouse of a pastor could be very helpful. Also, since the two most common problems in marriage are sex and money, those issues could be emphasized. That could be helpful, and with the marriage rate at Barclay, a forum like that could be very heavily attended. ☺*

- *Barclay did a good job of preparing for with information and theoretical situations. I think where it lacks is in the practical experience area. I don't know if that is something that can be taught, though. It may just be necessary to learn as you go. I think the one thing that would have helped me tremendously is a mentoring program of some sort. It could help even if there were simply a list of people like alumni, local ministers, and others who were willing to serve as mentors for ministry students. It would at least give them a place to start when looking for a mentor. (It is difficult to be a woman in ministry for me precisely because there are few options for mentors. Women pastors are rare in my denomination. Women pastors from other denominations are sometimes difficult to approach. Male mentors may be available, but not all are willing to mentor women – others feel it is inappropriate. It is scary to be out there on my own without having a more experienced person to talk to about what I am learning as a first-time pastor.)*
- *Despite the classes that I would like to see offered at some point in BC's future, I felt very prepared for ministry when the rubber hit the road. Barclay was a place where I learned the value and need for community, was challenged spiritually and academically, and where I built a strong foundation of identity and theological essentials. These factors have contributed to certain resilience that many of my seminary colleagues in my age bracket seem to lack, where I feel I have a firm foundation they seem to flounder. BC has also given me the spiritual and academic tools to critique and analyze church ministry practically as well as shifts of theological and doctrinal thinking. I also feel, due to the emphasis on community at BC, I am better equipped to network and fit in community as well as understand group dynamics and interpersonal relations. This again has led to some advantages spiritually, personally and academically. What has been difficult, which I am currently discovering, is being a young, single woman in ministry and seminary. There is a lot of support naturally built in for men, but for women, if they are not married (and even then I would wonder about support outside of marriage), support is little to non-existent. I would like to see a support group, a class at BC or something that would aid women in ministry to deal with loneliness and different senses of isolation and other challenges those women in ministry face. If I had a complaint about BC this would be that area.*



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April 25, 2008

Dear Friend,

Greetings in Jesus' name! **I am thrilled to invite you to participate in the very first spiritual retreat sponsored by the Center for Spiritual Renewal, which will be held May 23-26, 2008 (Memorial Day weekend) on the campus of Barclay College.** This Center is being established in order to provide opportunities for church leaders to experience personal and spiritual renewal in the context of a supportive Christian community. Our ultimate goal is to help alleviate the impact of burnout and help sustain effective, long-term spiritual leadership within the body of Christ.

Due to the generosity of the College and some of its key supporters, **this inaugural retreat is being offered completely FREE OF CHARGE to the first 20 people who register.** Your meals, lodging and program fees will be completely covered. All you need to come up with is your travel expense.

As a spiritual leader, we want to offer you this opportunity to let you know how much we love and appreciate you. Because this initial retreat will also serve as a "trial run", we want to offer this gift to you as an expression of our gratitude for the valuable contribution you will make to the future development of this vital ministry.

Our guest speaker/spiritual director for this guided retreat will be my good friend, Dave Nixon. Dave is one of two men who have been serving as spiritual directors for the Doctor of Ministry students who are currently enrolled in the Leadership and Spiritual Formation program at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. Dave is a dear brother, a seasoned minister of the gospel, and a gifted teacher. He has made special arrangements to be with us for this retreat, and I know you will thoroughly enjoy your time with him. He will be the primary facilitator for each of our main sessions which will focus on "Gettin' Your Groove Back" (for more information on Dave's background and the focus for this particular retreat please visit his website: www.sustainablefaith.com/guided-retreats).

The retreat will begin with supper on Friday, May 23, and finish with breakfast on Monday, May 26. We plan to have six main sessions (Fri PM, Sat AM, Sat PM, Sun AM, Sun PM, Mon AM) of 60-90 minutes each. The rest of the time will be yours to do with as you wish - sleep, daydream, read a book, play disc golf, take a walk, go for a drive, catch up with old friends, etc. Dave and I will be available to meet with you throughout the weekend, whether for informal conversation or more formal counseling and spiritual direction. Our hope is that you will leave this retreat feeling thoroughly refreshed, with a renewed awareness of how deeply and relentlessly you are loved by God and a renewed passion for the ministry God has called you to pursue as you seek to love his people in Jesus' name.

I am so thankful for you and for your partnership in the ministry of the gospel. I hope you can join us here on campus over Memorial Day weekend as we share our lives together and inaugurate the Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College. Please call or write if you have any questions or suggestions, or to reserve your spot at the retreat. We'll leave the light on for you!

Agape,

Dave

THE CENTER FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Evaluation Results for Guided Retreat: "Gettin' Your Groove Back" May 23-26, 2008

CATEGORY	Poor		Fair		Good
Location (5)	1	2	3	4	5
Facilities (5)	1	2	3	4	5
Food (4.7)	1	2	3	4	5
Rooms (4.8)	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities for Exercise & Recreation (4.7)	1	2	3	4	5
Schedule (5)	1	2	3	4	5
Sessions (4.7)	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching/Spiritual Direction (4.7)	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritual Exercises (4.6)	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Experience (4.9)	1	2	3	4	5
Total: 91.8 (out of a possible score of 100)					

What aspects of this particular retreat were MOST helpful and/or meaningful to you? I really appreciated the flexible schedule and the familial atmosphere. The speaker was unique and fascinating / The relaxed schedule with time to process things, relax, rejuvenate. The time alone and the time in community were precious and wonderful. The topics and discussions and insights were life giving / The great, flexible, open schedule; the time with Dave in spiritual direction, the fellowship, the sessions / One-on-one time with the speaker/counselor and friends. Also the relaxed, no pressure atmosphere was definitely my style / Time with everyone outside of sessions / I enjoyed the sessions a lot, but my favorite time was spent getting to know everyone at meals, around Dave's iPhone, etc.

What aspects of this particular retreat were LEAST helpful and/or meaningful to you? I think I would have liked to be a little more scripturally oriented, if possible / I can't think of anything! (x 3) / "Forced" prayer times are hard for me in group settings. Only happened once, but it wasn't that bad.

If we were going to charge a registration fee for retreats like this one in the future, what do you think might be a reasonable amount to request? \$75.00 - \$100.00

Additional Comments: Thanks so much, Dave, for guiding me to my "cave" and for your encouragement and speaking blessings into my life! / I have never received such a sense of peace out of a retreat as I have out of this one. Thank you.

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