

PASTORAL MALADIES AND THEIR REMEDY

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Pastor, you are not alone in your struggle and sorrow. Did you brush by that statement? Read it again. Read it five times, if necessary. You are not alone in your struggle and sorrow. Perhaps you are saying, “But I still feel alone. My situation has not changed. I feel like there is no one to confide in or turn to for help.” Does this sound familiar at all? If so, please keep reading. As someone who has been where you are, I can tell you with confidence that there is hope for you.

I am well acquainted with such thinking and feelings of despair and isolation. Over the last several years of my life and ministry, from roughly 2020-2022, I have battled moments and even extended seasons of deep darkness, spiritual depression, and despair. These years have undoubtedly contained the darkest moments of my life to this point. It was not uncommon, on my darkest days, to long to depart from this mortal coil and to be with the Lord. While I never attempted to make that desire a reality, the fact that it was enticing at all scared me. I genuinely was at a loss for how to proceed and get out of the hole I felt I was stuck in.

Let me tell you about the hole I found myself in. Perhaps it will resonate with you or perhaps your struggle will be different but relatable. You, of course, are aware of the COVID-19 pandemic that descended upon us in 2020. The pandemic, along with a very challenging relationship at my church during this time, were the context for my struggle, yet not the reason for it. As a pastor, I am responsible for shepherding one of God’s precious local churches in the greater Des Moines, Iowa area. I had already faced challenges in my ministry at that point, but I found the pandemic to be a challenge of a different nature for it revealed something in me that was hiding in my heart. In earlier challenges of ministry, I had found myself confident in the decisions that I was making because there was a clear right and wrong in them. With the pandemic upon us, suddenly I was thrust into a position of leading through what seemed to be a sea of gray areas and conscience issues. The struggle to lead wisely and well was complicated by my own deceitful heart. Ironically, from the pulpit I had repeatedly reminded folks that God was revealing something in all of us through this trial and seeking to produce something in us as well. But I was not ready for what he would reveal in me. I was fearing man. I feared man in the decisions that we had to make because no matter how well thought out our decisions were as a pastor team someone was not happy with it. I feared man because I held the desire to be liked and respected too highly in my heart. This quickly turned into self-pity, a form of pride. “Can’t they see I’m trying to lead wisely and well? What more do they want!?”¹

Fear of man is powerful. It has the power to cloud your view of God and to lead you down a path of folly. I experienced this firsthand. Rather than turning to the Lord with my fear, I sought escape. I did not like the feelings of despair and depression, so I wanted to get as far from them as possible. Guess what, though? Those feelings were linked to my perceptions and interactions with the very people God had called me to shepherd! So, you can guess where the choice to escape took me... to dangerous daydreaming about running away from ministry and moving to Belize to sell coconuts on the seashore with only my family as my concern. Sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? That’s because it is ridiculous! But I could not see that clearly back then.

¹ These thoughts warred within me, even though most of our church family had not been overly difficult to lead through this time.

Fleeing to the beaches of Belize was not the only form my idol of escape took. I also began to seek control in other areas of my life. I took control of our investments and began to actively trade on the stock market. I believed that if I could increase the amount of money in those accounts it would provide me with a path of escape if I decided to leave the ministry. This false hope ultimately revealed itself to be a foolish path. My illusion was dashed, and I was humiliated. Confessing this situation to my wife was embarrassing and eye-opening. It was hard to move forward with this cloud hanging over my head. Foolishly I desired to find some way to make it all back to make up for my sinful choices. Thankfully, God has given me a wise and loving spouse who counseled me out of such thinking.

I share these things with you to help you understand that I have been to the bottom of the pit of despair. I have known intimately the feeling of spiritual depression and have walked the road of folly firsthand. Throughout 2020 and some of 2021, I failed to open up to anyone fully about the depth of my struggles. I believed, wrongly, that my wife could not handle the burden and I was not sure how my friends or pastor team would respond if they knew it all. This too was influenced by the fear of man. In the words of the Apostle Paul:

Romans 7:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Who indeed? Am I all alone? Do I have to bear this cross on my own? Or does the Lord have answers for my struggle?

My hope thus far has been to let you in. Dear reader, this is an act of obedience on my part to my Lord. By sharing these struggles with you, I am growing in holiness before my King. I now know that I am not alone, and I do not have to keep these things to myself. And I want you to know the same hope. Even if your struggle has looked different than mine, there is hope for the discouraged, discontented, and despairing pastor (or layperson).

I know this to be true because I have experienced it firsthand. Through his Word and his people, God has reminded me again and again of such tremendous truths as I am about to share with you. I pray that these will wash afresh over your soul. I know the temptation to skim past the Scripture references in an article like these. Please do not do it. Stop and take as much time as necessary to read them and meditate upon them. Do not assume you already know them well enough because you are a pastor or biblical counselor. We always have more to learn and God is always teaching us.

Amid my struggles with despair, God used a dear pastor friend, Josh Greiner, to point me to 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. If you're not familiar with this passage, it is the recounting by the Apostle Paul of a very hard and dark season in his own life and ministry. Let me share it with you now. Please listen to the source of hope for him and how he persevered in the face of great despair.

2 Corinthians 1:3–11 (ESV)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted

by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Do you hear how Paul starts this precious section of his letter? By speaking of the identity of God – the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. We have a God who is merciful and who actively provides comfort to us in our affliction. You are not alone in your struggles and sorrows! God's mercy drives him to have compassion on us in our struggles. He is not cold and aloof. He is compassionate and near. The source of all comfort is near to you in your time of need. And he is not stingy with his comfort. What incredible truths to consider.

Draw your eyes to verses 8-10 for a moment. Listen to Paul explaining the depth of his despair. He says, "we despaired of life itself." He thought it was over. The situation or circumstances he faced were so great that he could not conceive of a way through them. It is not certain whether Paul thought his circumstances would be the end of him, or he was struggling with the desire to continue living. Regardless, things were grim and hope seemed long gone. Sound familiar at all?

"But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." Suddenly, in the midst of his dire and dark situation, he remembers that he knows the God who has resurrection power! Whatever it was that had driven Paul to the end of himself was allowed into his life for the purpose of teaching him to rely on God rather than self. Could it be that God is seeking to do the same in you? He certainly did that in me. In my fear of man, I had reduced God to a very small part of my life. I functionally acted as if I knew better than him. I tried to resolve things in my own abilities and with my own limited wisdom, which only made things worse! Little did I realize that the God who raises the dead was waiting for me to turn to him and cry out for help.

Paul shares of the hope-filled outcome for him in verse 10, "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again." Do you hear where Paul has set his hope? His hope is set on the God who raises the dead, the Deliverer, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. This was not a one-and-done thing for Paul. He set his hope on God in that specific dire situation, and he will continue to set his hope on God in the future, as often as necessary. Paul shows us the pathway out of despair - set your hope on God. Do this again and again, as often as necessary. Remember who he is, what he has done, and what he will do in your life as you trust in him.

Paul speaks to the purposes of affliction in the earlier verses. God allows affliction in our lives so he may comfort us and equip us to comfort others. It is by going through affliction that we are trained up as ambassadors of the God of all comfort. This is what I am seeking to be to you right now, an ambassador of the God of all comfort. I want you to know that it is possible to find help and hope in him, no matter how dark or deep the hole you are in seems to be right now.

I am personally blessed by the corporate nature of this teaching. Paul is writing to the Corinthians to share this incredible truth with them. He desires to share the comfort he's received with them. And he desires for them to partner with him in prayer, so that many will give thanks for the blessing that God provides through his ongoing rescue and comfort. Paul is a great example of a man who is transparent and shares his struggles with others, because he realizes that there is power in Christian community and corporate prayer for one another. We need each other. None of us are meant to endure our struggles and sorrows alone. Isolation is what the enemy wants. Community is what our God has given us. Embrace your church community. Allow your pastor team, if you have one, to walk with you. Do not short-circuit God's design for your life by keeping these men out. If you are a solo pastor, reach out to a fellow, like-minded pastor in your community for fellowship or consider reaching out to ACBC for counseling.

During my season of despair, I counseled with Pastor Tim Pasma. It was very helpful for me to have a brother who would speak the truth in love. He has been in ministry for as long as I have been alive, and he was a wealth of wisdom to me. There is no shame in receiving counseling in times of need. I have come to love Galatians 6:1 and Hebrews 3:12-14, which say:

Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 3:12–14 (ESV)

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

It is a blessing from God, a comfort of his, to provide community that can bear our burdens and protect us from sin's deceitfulness. You do not have to carry the weight alone. Allow others to put your arm over their shoulder so they can help you with the heavy lifting that comes with despair and spiritual depression. I found such community in my wife, my pastor team, the dear pastor friend I mentioned earlier, and Tim Pasma.

The letter of 2 Corinthians became a balm to my soul as I began to process through the struggles and spiritual battles of the last several years. I found Paul's candor in his own weaknesses to be refreshing and life-giving. Consider this beautiful confession in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

2 Corinthians 12:7–10 (ESV)

⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep

me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul was no stranger to trials and sufferings. And yet consider how he opens himself up to both the Lord and the church for help. He repeatedly brought the matter to Jesus desiring a particular outcome. When that outcome was not granted to him, Paul trusted God’s plan to display his sufficient power through his weakness. This passage is helpful to understand that our situation and circumstances may not change in the way we desire. It may be that God is going to use the hardships of life to help us grow in dependence upon him. And please note, this is not a dependence that is without resources; no, God intends to give his sufficient grace and power to meet us in our weaknesses, just as he did for Paul. If you truly believe this about God and your circumstances, then you are able to wrestle with the flesh and get to the place where you can join Paul in saying, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

That may not happen overnight. It did not for me. But as I honestly wrestled with the Word and the truth about God’s character and work, I began to have hope. I began to realize that God knows better than me and I do not see things clearly. My desire to escape and run away from my problems was not going to solve or resolve anything. It would not help me grow in Christlikeness or prepare me for eternity. But what would grow me in these ways is turning to the Lord, trusting him, submitting to his plan for my life and asking, “What do you want me to learn from this?”

And, as it turns out, he had a lot for me to learn. I imagine the same will be true for you too. That’s how our awesome God works! I just wish I had been quicker to come to this conclusion. My hope is that if you’re reading this that God might use me to prompt you to get there faster than I did.

Just this morning, I was struck by the reality that the Apostle Paul did not arrive at a quiet, content soul overnight. I do not know about you, but I really look up to Paul. He is a man that I can relate to, having come from a sinful background yet desiring to be of service to the Lord. But I think I probably have glamorized Paul’s faith a little too much. It is easy to do when you are not present for the day-to-day struggles and sorrows in his life. But today I read Philippians 4:10-13 again. Let me share it with you.

Philippians 4:10–13 (ESV)

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have

learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I have underlined what really struck me. Paul had to learn contentment and how to face the various situations that he encountered in his life in a godly manner. He did not wake up suddenly after trusting in Jesus for salvation with a perfected mind and body to respond perfectly to his situations and desires. There was still the process of ongoing sanctification in his own life that needed to take place. And that process is worked out through the highs and lows of life as God works in and through us to teach us and conform us to the image of his son! Maybe this is old news to you, but, to me, it is a beautiful reminder of the process I am also going through. Every struggle or sorrow I face is an opportunity to learn. It is an opportunity to learn more about being like Christ, about contentment in God, and about the holiness that I have been called to display in my life.

One of the lessons I had to revisit was what it meant to be a pastor. I found the beautiful teachings of 1 Peter 5:1-11 to be incredibly helpful to review repeatedly. In fact, I found it so helpful that I have sought to commit it to memory. I want to share it with you.

1 Peter 5:1–11 (ESV)

⁵ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Notice how Peter shepherds the shepherds. He reminds them of their calling (our calling, if you are a pastor) to lead in a way that is willing, eager, and an example to the flock. All of this is to be informed by humility towards one another and under the mighty hand of God. When I was fearing man and running hard after my idols, I was not living in obedience to this passage! I became a grumbling, discontent, and despairing pastor. It became hard to see the good that God was doing in and through me and instead it became natural for me to rehearse lies to myself. “I am not a good pastor. I was never meant to be a pastor. I am a fraud. It would be better if I just quit and went away.” I needed to humble myself under God’s mighty hand and trust him enough

to cast my cares on him. Functionally, I was acting like I knew better than God and that I was more capable of handling my problems than God. I had put myself in his place, which is a dangerous place to be!

I have no doubt that this is a spiritual battle. Peter says as much in this passage. The counsel in verses 8-10 is that there is an adversary – “your adversary” – who personally opposes you. He does not want to see you grow or produce good fruit that blesses many. So, the counsel is to “be sober-minded; be watchful; resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” Peter knows what he is talking about! To be sober-minded means to think clearly or to have control over your thoughts. It will not do to let your mind run out of control like I had been doing. If you find yourself undisciplined in your thought life and rehearsing lies to yourself over and over, this must stop. Realize that you are fueling the spiritual battle from which you want to be free! Often, we are going to need help to change our thinking or even to be watchful (i.e., alert) to these destructive thought patterns.

In my situation, I have counseled and helped many others to learn to identify these kinds of destructive thought patterns in their own lives, but I was struggling to do it for myself. My wife was instrumental in drawing these lies out to help me see they were untrue and to identify truth to replace them. Further, I found the discipline of Scripture memorization to be incredibly valuable in taking the fight to these lies rather than waiting for the lies to spring up and respond in a reactive manner. I am grateful for Pastor Mike Massey for his help in getting me back into this spiritual discipline. I mention those who have helped me so that you may see that our spiritual growth is a community project! If you are stuck, identify those who God has placed around you to help and walk with you. Do not go at it alone.

As I was struggling through my own battle with despair, I had the privilege of listening to a teaching by Pastor John Henderson at the *Biblical Counseling Training Conference* in Lafayette, Indiana in February 2022. The title of his talk was “Counseling Sufferers to Joy in a Living Hope” and it was an exposition of 1 Peter 1:3-9. In one hour, Pastor John described what it had taken me two years to learn the hard way. I would highly recommend listening to this lecture². One of the reasons I bring it up is that I was struck by his explanation of Peter’s phrase “a little while” in reference to the timeline of our sufferings. This phrase is found in both 1 Peter 1:6 and 1 Peter 5:10. Pastor John explained that we need to understand that “a little while” may very well mean the rest of our lives but the eternal hope that awaits us is beyond comparison to the light and momentary affliction we face in this life. Both passages go on to highlight the incredible grace of God that is being revealed in us through our eternal salvation in Jesus Christ.

Far too often, when we face immediate struggles and sorrows, we fixate on them rather than on the Lord. This is our undoing. There is no doubt that we will face struggles and sorrows in this life. After all we live in a broken, sin-cursed world in broken, sin-cursed bodies. Which is why it is so important and necessary to look to Christ often. You know this, as do I, but why is it so hard

² The mp3 of this lecture be found at <https://store.faithlafayette.org/browse-by-topic/counseling-sufferers-toward-joy-in-gospel-hope/>. It appears Pastor Henderson may have taught this lecture at other times and locations based on my Google search.

to remember amid trials and tribulations! Because we are fallible men and women, and we need others to point us back to our living hope. When we are too weak or too weary or perhaps too selfish to do so ourselves, we need Christian brothers and sisters to speak into our lives with the Word. This is again a plea to let others in. Do not go at this alone. If you have not caught on, God kept putting people in my path to confront me with the truth of his word and his plans to do good to me and to conform me to the image of his Son. It became impossible for me to think that my struggles and sorrows were disconnected from everything else in reality and somehow were meaningless and purposeless. I was confronted with the reality that I have a sovereign God who is able to force even the hard things of life to do good to me and to bring glory to himself (Romans 8:28-30). I recommend Rush Witt's book on despair titled *I Want to Escape* for your consumption. It was an invaluable resource that served to drive home many of the lessons I had been learning over the last several years. It asks questions that force you to think and respond in a way that helps identify the areas that need to change in your life.

Before I take my leave, I want to share two final lessons I have learned by walking through my own season of despair. As I was wrestling with my own shortcomings and musings about what standard I need to hold myself to as a pastor, I received some very helpful counsel. Pastor Mike Massey pointed me to Proverbs 3:3-4, which says:

Proverbs 3:3–4 (ESV)

*³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ So you will find favor and good success
in the sight of God and man.*

There are an untold number of manmade expectations that we can place upon ourselves or feel that others have placed upon us as pastors. These easily lend themselves to self-pity if we feel we do not measure up or boasting if we feel like we exceed them. But, at the end of the day, what matters is what God says and expects of us. And God expects us to be steadfastly loving and faithful. After all, that is exactly who he is! If you want to find favor and good success in the sight of God and man, then pursue steadfast love and faithfulness. I have found this simple passage so refreshing and refining in the daily battle of my thought life. It helps me sort through the noise and clarify what I am aiming for each day. Here is an example of how my self-talk has changed because of this truth. "Nick, your goal is to be steadfastly loving and faithful today, not to finish XYZ arbitrary goals or tasks that you have set for yourself. Your standard of success is not determined by how many tasks get crossed off the list but by your faithfulness to God." This way of thinking also protects me from the self-pity that I repeatedly felt when I came up woefully short of my own expectations. I hope it will aid you in doing the same.

The final lesson I will share is the reminder to enjoy the journey and the fruit that God produces in you along the way. If we truly believe that God is sovereign and at work in all things (especially the hard things of life), for our good and his glory, then we have every reason to rejoice! There is literally nothing that can stop God from producing the harvest of righteousness

that he intends in and through us. The passage that I have been meditating on recently in this regard is Galatians 5:16-17:

Galatians 5:16–17 (ESV)

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

While you have likely experienced some rotten fruit if you've descended into a pit of despair or spiritual depression, there is a way back out - walk by the Spirit. Choose the things that please God, not self, as you walk through your day and each decision of the day. You are likely familiar with the two lists of possible fruit that follows this passage. These fruits are produced based on whether you walk by the flesh or the Spirit. You get to choose which path you will walk on! So prayerfully and humbly choose to walk by the Spirit. Ask God to give you the desire and the obedience to do so. He delights to answer prayers that glorify him. I found that I had to change quite a few patterns of thinking and acting in my own life in this process. But as I made each change, it brought more and more joy into my life and a greater desire to keep pursuing the Lord and shepherding his people. The pain of confessing sin, asking forgiveness, and choosing a better way is worth it!

In conclusion, I desire to leave you with some clear takeaways and hope for the possible fruit from going to war with your despair and spiritual depression. If you've made it this far, then these will not be surprising to you. I hope you will write these down and go study the Scriptures yourself. Ask God to help you learn all that he intends for you in these passages! Come to them with the hope that things can and will change as you seek the Lord and walk in his ways.

1. Rely on God, not yourself (2 Corinthians 1:3-11)

You know the God that raises the dead; rely on him! He is able and willing to provide the mercy and comfort you need in the struggles and sorrows you are facing.

2. Lean into the community God has given you (Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 3:12-14)

There is no such thing as lone-ranger Christianity. You were made to be in relationship with God and others. Despite what your flesh or the enemy wants you to believe, you are not alone. You can talk to others about your struggles and sorrows. In fact, that is part of God's purposes for you in them. Let others in and let them walk with you. Enjoy the beauty of God's design for his church.

3. Embrace the process of learning holiness (Philippians 4:10-13)

All of us get to learn as we go through life. There is no such thing as immediate glorification while still on this earth. Embrace the process of God working in your situations and in your faults and flaws to produce an incredible life of holiness that glorifies him. He knows exactly what is needed to produce righteousness in you; do you trust him to do it?

4. Remember your calling as a pastor (1 Peter 5:1-11)

Pastoral ministry is hard, but it is a blessing. Remember how excited you were when you were first called into the ministry. Recall how the weightiness of shepherding the souls of others was not solely a burden but also a delightful entrustment. Keep your eyes fixed on the chief Shepherd who will provide an unfading crown of glory when he returns. Ask God to help you regain that sense of willing, eager, humble leadership of your flock.

5. Endure suffering for the “little while” that God has appointed for you (1 Peter 1:6, 5:10)

I do not know the details of your struggles or sorrows. I do not know the length of them either. But God does. And he knows exactly what is required to produce holiness in you. And he’s faithful and loves you enough to do it. I want to encourage you to trust him in that process, no matter how long it might be. Day by day, moment by moment, to trust him and to actively endure. This is what it means to follow Christ until the end. And I want you to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.”

6. Focus on what God requires of you (Proverbs 3:3-4)

God calls you to be steadfastly loving and faithful in your life and ministry. He does not demand a particular set of results. Paul helpfully reminds us that we are to sow the seed and water it, but God is the one who determines the growth or results. Cling to that truth. Aim for steadfast love and faithfulness in your daily ministry and trust God for the results. This will protect you from ungodly ambitions and self-pity.

7. Enjoy the wonderful fruit he produces in you (Galatians 5:16-24)

We know that God is faithful. Trust the process he has established to produce a harvest of righteousness in you. Day by day as you walk by the Spirit, you will see the fruit of the flesh being choked out of you and replaced by the fruit of the Spirit. This is a lot of fun! There will be tangible differences in your demeanor and behavior. I find that I have so much more energy and desire for life and ministry again. I am looking forward to the future and anticipating what God will do. That does not mean I never struggle. I still do. But now I have the tools to process my thinking and a community to ask for help. Each day is a battle and a series of choices for what I will believe, but I’m thankful that more days than ever are full of joy and choosing to serve the Lord.

P.S. Every passage I’ve shared with you in this discussion has become one of my memory verses or regularly reviewed passages on my truth list in my own battle. I am speaking to you as one who has been in the trenches and seen God work in wonderful ways. Do not lose heart. Whoever you are, wherever you are, I am praying for you to endure to the end! And, if you are one of those who has walked with me and encouraged me on my journey, I am eternally grateful for you!