



Thrive in Ministry

Developing an Integrated Spirituality

Three Questions:

Can you describe a time when you encountered a wall or a dark night that took the joy of your walk with God? A time when God was silent even though you were crying out?

What is your understanding of these times of God's quietness? Has this helped you work with members who are struggling spiritually?

What step were you able to take during this time? Do you still have "scars" from this time?

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. (2 Cor. 4:7-11 NRSV)

Paul's words are a powerful description of the life of following Jesus, and even more, a description of ministry as a pastor. When pastors are clear that the power belongs to God and not the vessel, their ministry can be healthy and whole. It can be a ministry that endures despair and persecution.

Kenneth Pargament describes a spiritual construct that clarifies how a pastor (or any person) could be afflicted, crushed, despair, persecuted, and struck down, but not lose hope in the midst of the storms of life and ministry. Pargament says that a well-integrated spirituality "is defined by pathways that are broad and deep, responsive to life's situations, nurtured by the larger social context, capable of



Accordingly, the greatest need you and I have— the greatest need of collective humanity— is renovation of our heart. - Dallas Willard

flexibility and continuity, and oriented toward a sacred destination that is large enough to encompass the full range of human potential and luminous enough to provide the individual with a powerful guiding vision." (Pargament, 2007, p. 134) Pastors whose spiritual life lacks depth and integrity suffer from stress and emotional exhaustion at a much higher rate. (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001, pp. 33–34)

Well-integrated spirituality is not about a set of practices or beliefs. It is not about liberal or

conservative theology. It is about a resilience in theology and faith/spirituality that enables a person to endure difficult situations.

Well-Integrated Spirituality

Broad and Deep: It has been said of American Christianity that it is 3000 miles across and an inch deep. The depth and breadth perspective on

spirituality gets at the same issue that was raised by Paul and the writer of Hebrew, “Are you still living on milk or have you moved on to solid food?” (1 Cor. 3:2, Heb. 5:12-13). Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich argue that Christians must move beyond the early stages of faith in order to have a depth and breadth of faith (Hagberg & Guelich, 1989, p. 93). They use the imagery of going through, over, or under a wall in order to move to a deeper faith.

Responsive: The concept of responsiveness deals with the power of faith to speak in powerful ways into our life. In the Deep South, the faith in most Euro-American churches in the 17th to mid-20th centuries too often focused on maintaining the status quo of slavery or segregation. The Negro Spirituals, on the other hand, provided an expression of living faith that helped slaves and later freed African-Americans to deal with horrific oppression. In the 1970s and 80s, the American church struggled with the question of divorce and church leadership. Today, the church is wrestling with racism, the #MeToo movement, LGBTQI issues, political divisiveness, suicide, health care issues, and other issues. The responsiveness of faith is less about coming to “right answers” than moving in right directions (Hagberg & Guelich, 1989, p. 93).

Flexibility and Continuity: Acts 10 and 11 provide a model of flexibility and continuity. For the first time, the church was facing a great influx of Gentile believers. Core to the Jewish faith was the covenant with God symbolized in practice of circumcision. These two realities collided at Cornelius’ house. How would the church proceed? Could they be both flexible and maintain continuity with the spiritual roots of the church? Clearly, the church found a way, not without pain and woundedness, but they found a way. Rigidity can be an issue for both liberal and fundamentalist pastors. Is a pastor’s faith and spirituality fragile and rigid or responsive to the leading of the Spirit? Clearly, there is an overlap between being responsive to the age and maintaining both flexibility and continuity.

Sacred Destination: For too many believers, the destination of their spiritual pilgrimage is to maintain a moral code. In a well-integrated spirituality, the sacred

destination is not about maintaining a moral code of shoulds, oughts, and musts. (Hall, 2012, p. 6) It is about a destination based on relationship with God and with others. It is a healing of the brokenness of the Garden; it is about a transforming life with God ((Kelly, 1996, p. 96)

Guiding Vision: Finally, Pargament states that a well-integrated spirituality provides a guiding vision for life. Pastors do not leave a legacy of faithfulness because they preach well. They are called to live beyond the ordinary. (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, pp. 12–13) This sense of vision and purpose enables pastors to live through the pain and suffering of being a spiritual leader. (Jones & Armstrong, 2006, p. 38) A clear sense of purpose and calling provides the foundation for pastors to survive times of emotional exhaustion. (Muse, 2007, p. 184) Many pastors might doubt their calling, but a well-integrated spirituality connects calling to ultimate purpose for life.

Conclusion

Dallas Willard writes, “Spiritual formation is, in practice, the way of rest for the weary and overloaded, of the easy yoke and the light burden (Matthew 11: 28-30), of cleaning the inside of the cup and the dish (Matthew 23: 26), of the good tree that cannot bear bad fruit (Luke 6: 43). And it is the path along which God’s commandments are found to be not “heavy,” not “burdensome” (1 John 5: 3).(Willard, 2005, p. 24)

Journaling Assignment:

Help your pastor wrestle through a time of spiritual dryness or the seeming absence of God.