



Thrive in Ministry

The Psychology of Hope

Three Questions:

What are some challenges over which you have no agency or pathway?

Do you regularly set goals for yourself or your church? Are they stretch goals, stepping goals? Do you ever intentionally “re-goal?”

Can you identify one stretch goal for your ministry and one for your own self-care over which you have agency and can identify pathways?

For preachers of the gospel, hope is always a central theme. This hope is about transformation and relationship with God. It is about God intervening on behalf of God’s children. This is theological hope and we will focus on this aspect of hope next week.

This learning resource will focus, the psychology of hope from the perspective of psychological capital (PsyCap). This is not wishful thinking (I hope to win the lottery), rather it is an intentional way of addressing challenges and problems. Like building resilience, there are steps that people can take to increase their psychological hope.

Hope is described as the antidote or the response to feeling powerless. In PsyCap, hope is framed as agency, pathways, and goals. A metaphor for understanding psychological hope is the game Jenga. In Jenga, players have a tower of small (or large) pieces. Players take turns removing a piece from the tower. The challenge is to avoid toppling the tower. Psychological hope asks, “Can you see your next move?” and “Do you have a way of taking that move?”



Instead of a negative, gloom-and-doom perspective of today's situation, authentic leaders must exhibit resiliency and be . . . hopeful and optimistic about the future. -Luthans and Avolio

Agency

Agency speaks to the issues of authority and control (these terms feel too strong). Too often, pastors face challenges over which they have little authority or control. For instance, pastors have little authority or control over volunteers. They can ask for volunteers, give assignments, set clear expectations, and provide support, but if the volunteers decide to go out of town at the last minute, pastors have little

recourse. Stewardship would be another example in which pastors have little authority or control. They can teach, encourage, and equip members, but people will set their own giving levels. What does this have to do with resilience? Setting goals in an area in which a person has no agency leads to frustration and exhaustion. And yet, pastors do it all the time.

It is important for pastors to identify areas over which they have agency in their ministry. Often this

requires pastors to reframe questions about the challenges. This is not a way for pastors to circumvent guidelines, but for pastors to intentionally identifying areas over which they have authority / control. Often through the practice of reframing, pastors can identify new solutions to problems in which they have agency instead reinforcing their powerlessness. (Parks, 2005, p. 60) Likewise, it is important for pastors to empower volunteers to have the “power, freedom, and authority” to make decisions and choices when they are assigned tasks. ((Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007, p. 69)

Pathways

Pathways speaks to clarity and vision. This vision not the grand vision of a corporate vision statement, but the vision and clarity that says, “I can see my next moves.”

To increase hope, pastors need to identify as many pathways as possible instead of a single pathway. Too often churches lock into “the answer.” In thinking about pathways, pastors are challenged to ask, “How else?” “What other ways can we go to find the answers to the desired outcome?” (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 69) Pastors and churches feel powerless when their “right way” of doing something is blocked or fails. By seeking new and various pathways, hope can be re-established.

It is important for pastors and volunteers to have the initiation to identify new pathways. (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 69) The willingness to be creative and to ask difficult questions is essential in discovering these pathways. Often churches have rigid structures that discourage people for asking about new ways of solving old problems.

Another key aspect of pathways is alignment resources (human, financial, etc.) to address the challenges that make a significant difference in the life of the church rather than reacting to the anxiety of a few who will consume all the energy and resources in the congregation. (Rendle, 2010, p. 103)

Goals

Most churches are facing so many challenges that they could have four or five BHAGs (Big Hairly

Audacious Goals). Setting too many big goals is discouraging to the pastor and the congregation. It reinforces feelings of powerlessness and emotional exhaustion.

Stretching Goals: These goals are just beyond the comfort level. It is riding uphill an extra 30 seconds or trimming 5 seconds of your time for running a mile, not trying to break the three hour mark for a marathon.

Stepping Goals: With big goals, it is important to break the goals down into smaller steps. Setting more, but smaller stretch goals, to reach the bigger goal. With the completion of each step, the next step is re-evaluated. In the past, churches would set a five- or ten-year plan with the goals built into the plan. If a goal was missed or shifted, the entire plan failed or was “shelved.”

Re-goaling: If a pastor or church truly sets stretching goals, there will be times when they do not fully achieve the goal. In re-goaling, the question is, “Now what?” or “What next?” This process requires perseverance, humility, and intentionality.

The purpose of goals in PsyCap is not some leadership methodology or manipulation. They are set to increase a sense of agency and clarify pathways. In other words, instead of being used to measure people or shift blame, they are utilized to build autonomy and hope. (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 69)

Journaling Assignment:

Your pastor is frustrated and wants to start looking for a new church. How can you help your pastor feel like they can help the church move forward.

