

CHAPTER 1

GOD'S LEADERS AND THE REALITY AND PROBLEM OF STRESS

This chapter will seek to define stress as understood in modern culture and then investigate the expression of stress within the biblical record, while analyzing the problem of stress relative not only to God's leaders in the Old and New Testament but contemporary clergy as well.

The Old and New Testaments are replete with examples of God's leaders, both men and women, who led faithfully while encountering stressful situations. A few notables worth mentioning are these: Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Job coping with immense health hardships, David's pain portrayed through the Psalms, Elijah's depression and ensuing disgust with life, Jeremiah's expression of grief through laments, Paul's burdens of ministry, and Christ Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane anticipating the horrific events that preceded his death on the cross.

One constant in regard to the aforementioned individuals, as well as other very prominent biblical leaders, is not only the sizable stressors they confronted but also the challenges they encountered. A cursory read of some of the highlights surrounding these stories of valiant effort affirm that these courageous leaders continue leading while frequently contending with extraordinary stress and at the same time struggling with doubt, insecurity, fear, indecision, rejection, warfare, defeat, despair, and depression, as well as suicidal ideas.

As in biblical times, contemporary culture is fraught with the complexities and challenges of life and, as a result, the current societal landscape appears heavily littered

with lives plagued by disease and disorders. These ailments seem like payback for years of stress, worry, doubt, and despair.

Currently, the demands placed on God's leaders, and clergy in particular, are immense, and the challenges faced are often overwhelming. Not only is the pastor expected to perform all the obvious pastoral duties presented in Scripture, it is also assumed that he will promote team leadership, establish and manage budgets and administration, and dedicate countless hours to counseling congregants. As a result, clergy now experience significant physical, emotional, and relational health challenges that often leave them powerless to fulfill their pastoral roles.

Evidence reveals that if all the dynamics involved in pastoring are not properly balanced, then accepting the call to pastor can be a death sentence; it can be like entering a prison and serving out a life sentence without the possibility of parole. The pastorate is not a calling for the faint-of-heart. The persecutors who sought to devour God's leaders in biblical times still prowl around like a "roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Satan's strategy, to infiltrate and take out⁸ the lives of God's leaders in an attempt to thwart the plan of God in saving mankind, is relentless. His tactics are brutal, and his plot against pastors is creating a problem in the pulpits of our time. Pastors are being worn down. They are discouraged and in anguish. Many are ready to give up the fight. In a sermon entitled "A Call to Anguish," the late David Wilkerson⁹ plainly

⁸ John 10:10.

⁹ David Wilkerson was the Founding Pastor of Times Square Church in New York City. He was called to New York in 1958 to minister to gang members and drug addicts, as told in the best-selling book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. In 1987, David Wilkerson returned to "the crossroads of the world" to establish Times Square Church. As a pastor of the church, he faithfully led this congregation, delivering powerful biblical messages that encourage righteous living and complete reliance on God. David Wilkerson had a strong burden to encourage and strengthen pastors throughout the world. From 1999 to 2008, he traveled

articulates Satan's vehemence in attempting to harass, hinder, and defeat God's leaders. He argues, "That's all the devil wants to do is get the fight out of you and kill it."¹⁰ Committed clergy are impassioned and feel compelled to go the distance in ministry, with intentions of fighting a full bout without being knocked out. However, the fight—once so powerfully active in many clergy—is now being replaced with pitifully tentative punches as the enemy bombards them with rounds of bloody blows. He will not rest from pursuing pastors as he knows his time is short.¹¹

Conversely, knowing the days are evil,¹² the pastor must prayerfully persevere as he has a biblical mandate to fulfill. He has a work to do for God, and his effectiveness is seriously impaired when he is hindered from ministering at an optimum level because of spiritual warfare with Satan and antagonists in the church. Regardless of the ministry stressors that may arise, the pastor must remain in continual communion with the Lord, seeking his wisdom and guidance to lead, as well as his grace to sustain him through difficult and challenging times:

The Lord has given to every man his work. It is his business to do it, and the devil's business to hinder him—if he can. So, sure as God gives a man a work to do, Satan will try to hinder him. He may present other things more promising; he may lure you with worldly prospects; he may assault you with slander, torment you with false accusations, set you to work defending your character, employ pious persons to lie about you, editors to assail you, and excellent men to slander you. You may have Pilate and

around the globe holding conferences for Christian ministers. See www.worldchallenge.org/en/about_david_wilkerson.

¹⁰ "David Wilkerson - A Call to Anguish," youtu.be/ObfvRIIg4T4.

¹¹ Rev 12:12.

¹² Eph 5:16.

Herod, Ananias, and Caiaphas all combined against you, and Judas standing by to sell you out for 30 pieces of silver. And you may wonder why all these things have come to pass. Can you not see that the whole thing is brought about through the craft of the devil, to draw you away from your work and hinder your obedience to Christ? Keep about your work. Do not flinch because the lion roars. Do not stop to stone the devil's dogs. Do not waste your time chasing the devil's rabbits. Do your work; let liars lie; let sectarians quarrel; let editors publish; let the devil do his worst. But see to it that nothing hinders you from fulfilling the work God has given you. He had not sent you to make money; He has not commanded you to get rich. He has never bidden you to defend your character nor has he bidden you to contradict falsehoods about yourself which Satan and his servants may start to peddle. If you do these things you will do nothing else; you will be at work for yourself and not for the Lord. Keep about your work. Let your aim be as steady as a star. Let the world brawl and bubble. You may be assaulted, wrangled, insulted, slandered, wounded, and rejected. You may be chased by foes, abused by them, forsaken by friends, despised and rejected of men, but see to it that with steadfast determination and with unfaltering zeal you pursue that great purpose of your life and the object of your being until at last you can say; "I have finished the work which you, dear God, have given me to do."¹³ Finishing the work is a concern for many pastors. To finish this significant work for God amidst a whirlwind of distraction, discouragement, and stress, today's clergy need constant reminders that they are not running this race alone; there is One who fathoms the difficulties of their demanding life and vocation. The author of Hebrews affirms, "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are" (Hebrews 4:15).

¹³ *Pulpit Helps* (August, 1992), 8. As cited on bible.org/illustration/every-man-his-work.

Focusing on the One who identifies with the hurts, heartaches, and headaches of humanity, as well as finding common ground with God's leaders who have persevered in the past, will give contemporary clergy incredible incentive to stay in the fight regardless of how challenging the rounds may be.

As a framework for understanding the comparable nature of stress among ancient and contemporary leaders, a brief definition of stress and depression will be presented here. A more detailed definition is presented in Chapter 2.

Stress Defined

In contemporary culture, the word "stress" is common, yet it is a very problematic word to define. The range of people experiencing stress is extensive, with stress beginning as early as adolescence and impacting every stage of life through adulthood. When questioned, members of each demographic will explain stress and its impact in their lives in very different ways, which makes it difficult to describe. According to the dictionary, stress is "strain felt by somebody: mental, emotional, or physical strain caused, e.g., by anxiety or overwork. It may cause such symptoms as raised blood pressure or depression."¹⁴

The American Institute of Stress suggests that stress is hard to define, and the list of signs and symptoms is very long.

Stress is not a useful term for scientists because it is such a highly subjective phenomenon that it defies definition. And if you can't define stress, how can you possibly measure it? The term "stress" as it is

¹⁴ www.bing.com/Dictionary/search?q=define+stress&qpv=define+stress&FORM=DTPDIA

currently used was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.”¹⁵

Stress As Expressed in the Bible

A natural starting point in attempting to understand stress as expressed in the lives of God’s leaders in biblical times would be to ask an important question, “Does the Bible utilize the word stress?” The simple answer is “No.” There are no biblical references which use the word “stress”; however, the Bible does include various terms or phrases relating to what we would consider as stress: fears (Ps 34:1-22), despair and disturbed (Ps 42:5), troubles (Ps 86:7; Job 5:7), hardships (Job 10:17; 1 Thess 2:9), affliction (Job 36:15; 2 Cor 6:4), adversity (Job 2:10; Ps 49:5; Eccl 7:14), pressure (Job 33:7; 2 Cor 11:28), disaster (Job 30:24; Jer 17:17), discipline or chasten (Job 5:17; 1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:6), circumstances (Phil 1:2; 4:11), trials (Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 1:6; 4:12), tribulations (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 5:3; 8:35), ordeals (2 Cor 8:2; 1 Pet 4:12), difficulties (2 Cor 12:10) distresses (Rom 8:35; 2 Cor 6:4; 12:10), persecution (John 15:20; 2 Cor 12:10; 2 Tim 3:12), suffering (Phil 1:29; 1 Pet 4:12, 13), and anxieties (1 Pet 5:7).

Like stress, depression is a word that does not specifically appear in the Bible. It is though an ailment to which many of God’s leaders allude. It is an alternative term relating to stress. Clinical psychologist Gary R. Collins explains:

Depression is a clinical term that is not discussed in the Bible even though the condition appears to have been common. Psalms 69, 88, and 102, for example, are songs of despair, but notice that these are set in the context of hope. In Psalm 43 David expresses both depression and rejoicing.¹⁶

¹⁵ “Stress, Definition of Stress, Stressor, What Is Stress?” www.stress.org/topic-definition-stress.htm.

¹⁶ Gary Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 106.

Burnout is yet another popular term describing the situation in which many pastors today find themselves, due to the unrelenting stress related to the expectations of their job. Burnout is described as

a state of physical, mental, spiritual and emotional exhaustion caused by extended and intense levels of stress, causing the body to over-produce adrenaline. It leads to the questioning of one's abilities and/or the value of one's work.¹⁷

The Bible indicates that some of God's leaders experienced symptoms of what would appear to be burnout while ministering during stressful situations. Exodus 18 is perhaps the most familiar event: Moses is drained in dealing with the issues of the Israelites, when a visit from his father-in-law, Jethro, results in steps being taken to protect Moses' sanity and health.

In view of what Paul affirms in relation to the Old Testament leaders, i.e., "All these things happened to them as example, and they were written for our admonition..." (1 Cor 10: 11), consideration should be given to the Old and New Testament heroes and heroines of God as admonition and instruction to contemporary audiences. Paul's affirmation is a premise for this thesis.

¹⁷ "Pastor Burnout Definition," www.pastorburnout.com/burnout-definition.html.

Biblical Precedents of Leaders in Stressful Situations

Adam and Eve

In the beginning, after God created the first man and woman, he provided them with a home of beauty and plenty in an exquisite paradise. From the biblical record, it appears they were able to live and maneuver unencumbered by pressure, worry, and stress. The Bible states that what God created was “good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” (Gen 1:31). Adam, the first created man, functioned as God’s first human leader after God brought “every beast of the field and every bird of the air” (Gen 2:1–20) to him and invited Adam to give each of them a name. This, no doubt, was a daunting task for the normal human but, operating without sin and with an unspoiled mind, according to Scripture, Adam delivered.

Genesis 1 and 2 present a perfect creation, but the biblical narrative quickly segues from this utopian scene to the tragic fall of man. In chapter 3, the serpent (Satan) enters the story, initiating with malicious intent a conversation with Eve, the first woman. He falsely states God’s command, which sows seeds of doubt and temptation, eventually leading to disobedience. The result is that sin entered the world, opening the floodgates to a new human phenomenon called stress.

God confronts Adam and Eve with their sin and renders a guilty verdict. As he sentences them to their punishments, one can only imagine how abnormal Adam and Eve felt, as the first unfamiliar and strange symptoms developed, culminating in stress, as the magnitude and consequence of their sin began to quickly unfold. What began as an exceptional and intimate relationship with the Creator of the world would evolve into an

existence of unknowns. Adam stands before God experiencing angst and fear for the first time since the day God created him. What follows is a tragic scenario in which mankind goes from bad to worse. In the ensuing years, sin would continue to bring about various human sensations encompassing fear, worry, rejection, pain, toil, as well as jealousy and murder.

Abraham

Abraham, the Olympian of faith, was commanded by God to leave all that was beloved and familiar and transition to a place that was remote, unknown, and uncertain. In spite of not having a pattern before him for guidance and encouragement, Abraham obeyed. His compliance with God's call was a blind expression of faith, a faith God accounted to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:9). Is it conceivable that Abraham's faith was conjoined with a tidbit of stress? Arguably, his faith was the anchor that kept him stable amid angst and fear. The findings of recent studies performed by Professor Michael Inzlicht of the University of Toronto support this notion:

A new study has confirmed what many people already believed: having faith in God can help block anxiety and minimize stress. According to the University of Toronto research, the brains of believers and non-believers work differently under stress ... Compared to non-believers, the religious participants showed significantly less activity in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), a portion of the brain that helps modify behavior by signaling when attention and control are needed, usually as a result of some anxiety-producing event like making a mistake. The stronger their religious zeal and the more they believed in God, the less their ACC fired in response to their own errors, and the fewer errors they made. "You could think of this part of the brain like a cortical alarm bell that rings when an individual has just made a mistake or experiences uncertainty," says lead author Inzlicht, who teaches and conducts research at the University of Toronto [Scarborough campus]. "We found that religious people or even people who simply believe in the existence of God show

significantly less brain activity in relation to their own errors. They're much less anxious and feel less stressed when they have made an error," the expert added. These correlations remained strong even after controlling for personality and cognitive ability, says Inzlicht, who also found that religious participants made fewer errors on the Stroop task than their non-believing counterparts.¹⁸

God promised Abraham, already old, that he would have a son, and Abraham waited on the Lord for the promise for another quarter-century. Although Abraham and his wife Sarah were well beyond the age of childbearing, "He did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom 4:19). The late Kenneth Wuest, noted New Testament Greek scholar, points our attention to the specific word *consider*:

"*Considered*" which is *katanoeō* (κατανοέω), means "to consider attentively, to fix one's eyes or mind upon." "The best texts omit the negative before 'considered.' Not being weak as respects faith, Abraham considered attentively his physical condition, stared his obstacles right in the face. The words 'now dead' are a perfect participle in the text. That is, so far as procreative functions were concerned, Abraham's body had died, (ceased to function) and was as a result in a condition in which it would stay dead (never function again). The door was absolutely and forever closed so far as having offspring was concerned."¹⁹

From the biblical record, all communication from God to Abraham would presuppose the likelihood of the presence of stress in Abraham's life, even though he exercised tremendous faith in the midst of unfamiliar territory. But the supreme challenge to Abraham's faith, surpassing the call to leave his homeland and even the promise of a

¹⁸ In the research led by Assistant Psychology Professor Michael Inzlicht, participants performed a Stroop task - a well-known test of cognitive control - while hooked up to electrodes that measured their brain activity. S. Reeraman, "Faith in God Reduces Anxiety and Stress In Believers," www.medindia.net/news/Faith-in-God-Reduces-Anxiety-and-Stress-In-Believers-48317-1.htm (accessed Mar 12, 2012); "Faith in God Reduces Anxiety and Stress In Believers," www.medindia.net/news/Faith-in-God-Reduces-Anxiety-and-Stress-In-Believers-48317-1.htm#ixzz1o75xliok (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

¹⁹ K. S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 71-72.

son so late in life, was the command some years later to sacrifice his son Isaac to God, as we read in Genesis 22.

Joseph

Joseph reminds us that any stress can be endured when we wait on God. Genesis 37:2 tells us Joseph was 17 years of age when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver, and he ended up in an Egyptian prison. Genesis 41:46 tells us, “Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.” For 13 long years, Joseph was alone in that barbaric confinement. Again and again, his hope for release was bitterly disappointed. We read nowhere in Scripture that God gave Joseph an explanation for his captivity. Nevertheless, we can imagine the torturous thoughts that penetrated this prisoner’s mind and the stressful situations he encountered during his imprisonment. Yet when he finally stands before Pharaoh, he credits God alone with the interpretation and illumination of Pharaoh’s dream. Still he is full of faith in God. We see:

Joseph the prisoner (Gen 39:20–41:39): He is falsely accused and cast into prison. There God tests his character. Joseph the prophet (Gen 41): According to an earlier biblical account (see Genesis 41), Joseph predicts seven years of plenty and seven years of famine and is released from prison. Joseph the prime minister (Gen 41:41–56): The king makes him second in command.²⁰

Joseph’s providential role in Israel’s deliverance is spelled out beautifully in Ps 105:16–22.

²⁰ H.L. Willmington, *The Outline Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 275.

Moses

The biblical account of Moses is replete with events indicating the close relationship Moses shared with God. The one chosen by God to deliver the nation of Israel from Egyptian captivity is nevertheless the one who later shows signs of depression under great duress. “And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?” (Num 11:11, KJV) Frustration, due to the Israelites complaining while wandering in the wilderness, arguably drives Moses toward negative thinking, a classic symptom of depression. Doubt, along with a disparaging view of his ability to lead God’s people, consumes Moses, causing him to overlook the favor of God upon his life. However, despite often stressful situations, Moses teaches us a great lesson, that spiritual health includes recruiting strong leaders to stand around us. In Numbers 10:29, Moses reaches out to his father-in-law, Hobab, and says,

“We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, ‘I will give you.’ Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the Lord has promised good things to Israel ... Please do not leave, inasmuch as you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes” (Num 10:29, 31).

Hobab gladly accepted because he felt needed; he could justify the investment of his time. His son-in-law had said: “You will be our eyes.” A helpful paraphrase could read, “You know your way around. We are depending on your experience and leadership to get us through.” And it helps to have family you can count on for direction when you are on a journey through challenges and difficulties:

Moses’ interest in taking Hobab was not merely to enable Hobab to participate in the blessings of the Promised Land. Moses was also interested in benefiting from Hobab’s familiarity with the desert routes

ahead of them (vv. 31-32). Later accounts suggest that Hobab was persuaded to go and that he became an ancestor of certain Israelite tribal units (Jud. 1:16; 4:11).²¹

Joshua

Joshua, the son of Nun, confronted daily stressors, and yet he reveals in one key passage a crucial element to his success: “And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15). Filling the shoes of the great leader Moses was unnerving to say the least. Like his predecessor, Joshua would also lead through times of great distress. Upon the Israelites’ defeat, suffered at Ai and resulting in the death of 36 men, Joshua manifests expressions of unbearable stress:

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!” (Josh 7:6–7)

Joshua’s long life started in Egyptian bondage and ended in a worship service in the Promised Land. In between those events, God used him to lead Israel in defeating the enemy, conquering the land, and claiming the promised inheritance. What strengthened him along that arduous journey? Joshua’s entire family was committed to God.

In days when faith is weak and compromise has become general, when the sense of duty is slight or the definitions of duty vague, it is well that the spirit of Joshua should be displayed among the leaders in Israel, and that

²¹ J. F. Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 226.

there should be those who will take their stand boldly upon the declaration,
 “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”²²

Deborah

The Old Testament’s lone female Judge of Israel, Deborah stands out as one of many women in the Bible who obeyed God, followed their hearts, observed moral values, and displayed great courage in the face of bias and adversity. Scripture offers glimpses into the unfortunate treatment of women in both the Old and New Testaments. They were company to the poor, the foreign, and the unlearned in situations of prejudice. Biblical women such as Deborah, Queen Esther, and the prophetess Huldah were powerful, effective, and faithful in their obedience to God. They preserved the faith in incredibly stressful situations when many men disregarded God’s will and surrendered to paganism. Deborah reminds us that God uses women just as mightily as he does men. We read about these powerful prophetesses in the Bible: Miriam—Exod 15:20, Huldah—2 Kgs 22:14-20; Anna—Luke 2:36-38, Philip’s four daughters—Acts 21:8-9 and, of course, Deborah—Judg 4:4. Deborah gained renown on her own merit, not because of her relationship to a man. The Bible leaves no room for male chauvinism but, conversely, reminds us that women can be empowered by the Holy Spirit for effective service for Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:28 corroborates this truth: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

What Paul is saying, then, is that all such distinctions—be they racial-religious (‘neither Jew nor Greek’), social (‘neither slave nor freeman’), or

²² H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed. *The Pulpit Commentary: Joshua* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2004), 350.

sexual ('no male and female')—must be thoroughly and forever abandoned, since in Christ all are equal.²³

Israel is enduring a heavy yoke of oppression under King Jabin's rule. Unquestionably, the domination over Israel by a pagan king set the stage for the position of Israel's judge to be a nerve-wracking one. Deborah hears a divine oracle from God and, upon receiving her orders, she calls for Barak, the Israelite warrior and commander, and directs him to gather 10,000 troops for battle, to go to Mount Tabor to confront Sisera, Jabin's general. Barak consents to the mission, but with one condition—he demands Deborah's presence on Mount Tabor. Barak's response is unique and priceless. "And Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!'" (Judg 4:8). Deborah agreed to go, but prophesied to Barak that the battle would be credited to a woman and not a man (Judg 4:9).

Jael

No matter the extent of daily stressors the pastoral family confronts, physical and emotional health involves being decisive. Jael's resoluteness and quick thinking in the midst of a unique and stressful situation serves as incredible inspiration for the pastoral family. Although the wife of a man belonging to the Kenite tribe, which was at peace with Jabin the Canaanite king, Jael demonstrated her loyalty to Israel, Jabin's enemy. Displaying the customary hospitality of the day, she invited the escapee Sisera, Jabin's general, into her tent, gave him milk instead of water, provided a place to sleep, and then

²³ W. Hendriksen and S. J. Kistemaker, *Vol. 8: New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 150.

premeditatedly drove a tent peg into his temple.²⁴ Was there a moment of doubt as this stressful event unfolded realizing she was the key to ending a war? Did Jael advance with steady hands as she slew the general? Deborah, the prophetess in inspired scriptural poetry, reflecting on the God-given victory over the Canaanites, praises Jael for this deed.²⁵ Jael's story is a stark reminder of the strength and wisdom God can give women who are surrendered to the Lord. Pastor, Bible teacher, and prolific writer Warren Wierbse provides this commentary on the account:

When Heber's wife, Jael, came out to meet Sisera and invited him into her tent, the Canaanite captain was sure that he was at last safe. After all, in that culture nobody would dare enter a wife's tent except her husband. Jael gave him milk instead of water and then covered him with a blanket, and he was confident that he had found a dependable ally and could rest in peace. But Sisera made the mistake of telling Jael to lie if anyone asked whether he was there. Being a wise woman, she concluded that Sisera was fleeing the battlefield, which meant that the Jews had won the battle and the Canaanite grip on the land was broken.²⁶

Gideon

Israel's on-again, off-again relationship with God sets the stage for God to sovereignly select great leaders to free His people. Upon God's call, one young man, named Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh rises to the challenge, but not without uncertainty. The stress of insecurity prompts Gideon to request a series of proofs from God. Gideon provides an example of the proper way to "test" God.

Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now

²⁴ Judg 4:17, 18, 21, 22.

²⁵ Judg 5:6, 24–31.

²⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Available: An Old Testament Study* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 38–39.

be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.’ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. (Judges 6:39–40)

In reality, all of the stressors and problems we face in ministry appropriately “test” the resources of God. Spiritually, we have times when we lay a fleece before God. Angst and uncertainty often provoke God’s leaders to ask for a sure indication of the Lord’s leadership and hand in their lives. This is not a frivolous thing. And one thing we discover for sure: God is faithful. God is sovereign, but He uses human agency to accomplish His purpose.

Wherever anything is to be done, either in the Church or in the world, you may depend upon it; it is done by one man. The whole history of the Church, from the earliest ages, teaches the same lesson. A Moses, a Gideon, an Isaiah, and a Paul are from time to time raised up to do an appointed work; and when they pass away, their work appears to cease.²⁷

Ruth

Ruth is perhaps the Bible’s most celebrated leader in terms of loyalty. Given the overwhelming obstacles against her that could have kept her from realizing any success—she was a woman, she was poor, and she was a foreigner—her life story exemplifies the triumph of courage and resourcefulness over adverse and stressful circumstances. Presented with the opportunity, she could have agreed to what appeared to be the sensible solution to the dilemma before her. Add to the list of obvious disadvantages the fact that Ruth becomes a widow and is asked to leave her mother-in-law’s side and return to her own mother and remarry. Ruth’s display of devotion toward Naomi is unparalleled.

²⁷ *10,000 Sermon Illustrations* (Biblical Studies Press, 2002).

Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me. (Ruth 1:16–17, NKJV)

Ruth gives us the firm conviction that we can trust God’s grace in every situation we face in ministry. Ruth, a Moabite, was outside of God’s covenant. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever” (Deut 23:3). How then could Ruth enter into the congregation of the Lord? By trusting God’s grace, Ruth threw herself completely on his mercy. Law excludes us from God’s family, but grace includes us if we put our faith in Christ. And it is God’s grace that can carry us in *any* situation we face. The genealogy of Jesus Christ presented in Matthew 4 records the names of five women, four of whom have very questionable backgrounds: Tamar committed incest with her father-in-law;²⁸ Rahab was a Gentile harlot;²⁹ Ruth was an outcast Gentile Moabitess;³⁰ and “the wife of Uriah” was an adulteress.³¹ How is it that they were all included in the messianic line? The answer is to be found in the sovereign grace and mercy of God.

Saul

Handsome, standing head and shoulders above everyone else, Israel’s first King, Saul, relishes the successful beginning of his reign. He and his army defeat the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Amalekites. However, the booty from

²⁸ Gen 38:3.

²⁹ Josh 2:5.

³⁰ Ruth 1:5.

³¹ 2 Sam 11:6.

the Amalekite victory proved too tempting for Saul. He took of it, and God took from him—from that day forward God rejected him as king of Israel. The tragic events surrounding Saul’s early reign affirm the warning Scripture poses to all of God’s children who are in the fight and begin focusing on the fortune instead. We are “drawn away by our own desires and enticed” (Jas 1:14). Saul’s fall begins when he surrenders to his desire, and from that point on Saul struggles as he teeters from emotion to evil and then from evil to another emotion, ultimately ending in death. As James 1:15 records: “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” Theologian and Bible scholar, Adam Clarke’s 40-year investment in writing a commentary on the Bible shines in his summation of James 1:15:

When lust hath conceived ... When the evil propensity works unchecked, it bringeth forth sin—the evil act between the parties is perpetrated. And sin, when it is finished ... When this breach of the law of God and of innocence has been a sufficient time completed, it bringeth forth death—the spurious offspring is the fruit of the criminal connection, and the evidence of that death or punishment due to the transgressors.³²

Saul, Israel’s first king, is an historical example of the reality that even after being used by God you can resort to desperate measures and commit suicide. He is not alone in the Bible’s hall of infamous suicides. Abimelech hastily called his armor-bearer and asked the man to kill him.³³ Showing great remorse, Samson took his life.³⁴ Saul’s sin finally caught up with him, and he took a sword and fell on it.³⁵ His armor-bearer followed his example and committed suicide.³⁶ When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, “he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he

³² Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Bible Commentary*. www.godrules.net/para/jam/paralleljam1-15.htm. Accessed March 12, 2012.

³³ Judg 9:54.

³⁴ Judg 16:30.

³⁵ 1 Sam 31:4.

³⁶ 1 Sam 31:5.

was buried in his father's tomb" (2 Sam 17:23). Zimri, the evil king, took his life in a fiery death.³⁷ And Judas illustrated the vast difference between remorse and repentance when he hung himself.³⁸ "Judas's remorse was not repentance of sin, as the King James Version suggests. Matthew did not use *metanoēō*, which means a genuine change of mind and will, but *metamelomai*, which merely connotes regret or sorrow."³⁹ It is not uncommon to have suicidal ideas when problems get heaped on us—sociologists tell us most people at some point in their life have had such an ideation, if only briefly. It is in those moments that we not only turn to the Lord, but also to a trusted friend.

David

David, the young and humble shepherd boy, who is next in line as God's choice to replace the wayward King Saul, experiences multiple life situations marked by pressure, anxiety, fear and, at times, even despair. However, the focus of the following vignette suggests the depth of a father's unpretentious love for his child. David's story shows the utter agony and grief a pastor and his wife would manifest over a wayward son or daughter. "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!" (1 Kgs 16:18). His words only a loving parent could articulate. The sun and wind of the centuries have failed to dry the tears or still the anguish of this exceedingly sorrowful cry. Who was this distraught person? David, the first king in history to be selected according to ability rather than birth, stained his palace with his tears. He was courageous. His character crowned him king. He was considerate

³⁷ 1 Kgs 16:18.

³⁸ Matt 27:5.

³⁹ J. MacArthur, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), comment on Matt 27:1.

and in many ways magnanimous. Twice he spared the life of his enemy, Saul. In spite of his sins, the people of Judah loved him. David was God's leader, a good ruler, a fine soldier, and a wise statesman. He did not fail as a king; however, he failed as a father. Perhaps he was too involved in royal responsibilities to relate adequately to his family. As will be reported in this thesis, stressors are aimed at the pastor's family. Consequently, both the pastor and pastor's wife must be ready for the many trials and attacks that their children will encounter.

Overwhelmed, the king retired to an upper room where he privately poured out his heart before God in unremitting grief. The depths of his love for his rebel son are couched in his lament, If only I had died instead of you. Two of David's sons, Amnon (13:28-29) and Absalom (18:15), died violent deaths as a consequence of David's sin (12:10).⁴⁰

Jonah

When called to the mission field, the prophet Jonah disagreed with God's instructions for him and, instead of acquiescing, he chose to run away from God. However, Jonah was never out of God's reach. God sent a storm in the middle of Jonah's distress and disobedience, allowing him to confront the stressors of his call. Contemporary clergy can identify with Jonah's dilemma. Perhaps it is a crisis of our calling, the mission, or even a crisis of faith. The pastorate is often about re-learning things we already know and then learning new lessons as a result of the mistakes we make. Jonah's story illustrates that God gives pastors second chances. He uses and re-uses pastors and gives pastors

⁴⁰ Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 473.

assurance that when God calls a man for a mission He stands with us in our darkest moments.

Jonah also portrays the vivid emotions that accompany the Lord's work. As we interact with people making wise and poor decisions, it is impossible to "cut the emotional umbilical cord" that attaches us to them. There are days when, for the pastor, it is simply overwhelming to watch the heartache in people's lives. Jonah was the prophet of Israel; Amittai's son⁴¹ of the Zebulunite city of Gathhepher, he is featured in 2 Kings 14:25, which records how he had a major prophetic role in the reign of King Jeroboam II.⁴² Jonah had conveyed a message—encouraging expansion—to the king of Israel, whose reign was marked by prosperity, expansion and, unfortunately, moral decline. Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh doubtless stemmed partly from his knowledge that the Assyrians would be used as God's instrument of punishment of Israel. The prophet, who had been sent to Jeroboam to assure him that his kingdom would prosper, was the same prophet God chose to send to Nineveh to forestall that city's and nation's destruction until Assyria could be used to punish Israel in 722 B.C. Is it any wonder that the prophet reacted emotionally to his commission? We find the interesting word "prepared" in this book. "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jon 1:17). "And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery" (Jon 4:6). God prepares the way for us. He knows exactly what we need and when we need it. We can trust Him.

⁴¹ Jon 1:1.

⁴² 793–753 B.C.

Jeremiah

The prophet Jeremiah stands as a champion of perseverance and his story demonstrates God's infinite grace during times of tremendous distress in the Lord's work. Jeremiah experienced the ridicule of and eventual imprisonment by the king(s) he tried to warn. His aching heart is painfully portrayed in his laments. *Lamentations* is a beautiful illustration of Jeremiah's grief process while maintaining his hope;⁴³ it gives every pastor the promise of God's tender care and comfort even as they often minister without receiving anything in return.

Jeremiah's life and endurance, through two decades with no results and only silence from heaven, is grounded in his love for God's word. "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jer 15:16). God's word is food for our souls—wisdom to help us make each and every decision in ministry. Spurgeon had an interesting interpretation of this great verse from the weeping prophet:

It is not "I did hear them," for that he might have done and yet have perished. Herod heard John gladly, and yet became his murderer. He does not say, 'I did learn them by heart.' Hundreds have committed chapters to memory and were rather wearied than benefited thereby. The scribes fought over the jots and tittles of the law, but were blind leaders of the blind notwithstanding. It is not, 'Thy words were found, and I did repeat them,' for that he might have done as a parrot repeats language it is taught. Nor is it even, 'Thy words were found, and I remembered them,' for though it is an excellent thing to store truth in the memory, yet the blessed effect of the divine words comes rather to those who ponder them in their hearts. What is meant by *eating* God's words? The phrase signifies more than any other word could express. It implies *an eager study*—"I did eat

⁴³ Lam 3:21-26.

them.’ I could not have too much of them, could not enter too thoroughly into their consideration.”⁴⁴

Daniel

From deportee to dreamer to the lion’s den, Daniel lived to be nearly 100 years of age, and he demonstrated the power of personal purity. His life illustrates the promise of God’s presence during horrendously stressful periods as well as his promotion of us when we obey him and display courage amidst stress and testing in ministry. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” (Dan 1:8). Personal purity and holiness protects us from the decadence of our age. Weakness in our flesh can lead us to sin. Sin separates us from fellowship with God—the source of our spiritual power for Christian service. Daniel’s determination to aspire to purity of heart and character, even to his diet, is a challenge to men and women who serve as pastors in the local church. “Yet Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.” His friends concurred in this decision as is evident from the following verses (cf. Dan 1:11–16). The word *Gāal* (“defile”) occurs 11 times in the Old Testament (e.g., Mal 1:7, 12; Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64; Isa 59:3) and refers to moral or ceremonial defilement. In this case, Daniel would have been defiled on both counts.”⁴⁵ When we are cleansed of sin we are free in our spirit to

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon and T. Carter, *2,200 Quotations: From the writings of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 253.

⁴⁵ S. R. Miller, *Daniel* (New American Commentary 18. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 66.

lead God's people in worship. Purity brings spiritual power. Lethargy in our spiritual lives is due to sin.

Esther

From months of pampering and beauty treatments to one monumentally stress-filled decision, Esther is between a rock and a hard place. A woman in her position taking a life-threatening risk not only for herself, but for her people as well, Esther proves that one life, dedicated to God, can make a decided difference in people's eternal destinies and the world itself. In order to make an eternal difference in the lives of people, we must be emotionally healthy. Mordecai's challenge to Esther is reminiscent of how one Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one Billy Graham, and one Martin Luther can make a crucial difference and alter the course of history.

For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this (Esth 4:14).

The stewardship of our health, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually is grounded in the recognition that God has strategically placed us in our ministries at this particular time and for His particular purpose. Wiersbe amplifies the text from Esther:

Now, if God brought her to the throne, then He had a purpose in mind, and that purpose was now evident: She was there to intercede for her people. The statement of Joseph to his brothers comes to mind: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Committed: An Old Testament Study* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), 111.

Roop adds, “This passage is a key to the basic meaning of the entire book, namely, to demonstrate the unfailing providence of God in behalf of his people Israel. Mordecai’s implications were quite clear and his plea was irresistible.”⁴⁷ Our one life is worth protecting—God has plans to use us and we must be healthy and emotionally balanced so that he can do so.

Job

Job’s life of total awareness of God’s providence gives us clues to the mindset that gives health to the believer. Job confesses to God, “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You” (Job 42:2). It is a stunning admission. Think for a moment of the mental consolation wrapped up in this one exquisite verse! As we have learned in Scripture, God is omnipotent—all-powerful. God has everything in control, even when it seems everything is out of control. Needling Job through his many trials and afflictions were three friends with their homespun philosophies and man-made interpretations of Job’s woes. The Lord teaches Job another essential element of health. Job must not retaliate or have bitterness against his detractors and adversaries. Rather, God is only pleased and ready to turn Job’s trials into blessings when he begins to pray for his friends. “And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

Job’s vision of God’s transcendence and his ensuing repentance paved the way for his forgiveness of and intercessory praying for his three friends. Then his forgiving spirit toward them paved the way for God to bless him.

⁴⁷ C. F. Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), comment on Esth 4:9.

His painful disease was cured either at this time or immediately after his repentance (v. 6). All his brothers ... sisters, and acquaintances (probably including the forgiven three), who had forsaken him (19:13-14), heard of his restoration. They now dined with him in his house. They comforted ... him regarding his trouble (*rā'āh*, “calamity”), though this was probably less consoling than if they had done so earlier. This woe, as Job himself had acknowledged (1:21; 2:10), was brought on by the LORD (through the instrumentality of Satan).⁴⁸

Repeated studies have produced convincing evidence that people get healthier when they pray—and when people pray for their enemies. Jesus taught, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt 5:44). Stress is reduced and health is increased when we learn to pray for those who have hurt us.

Elijah

Elijah’s ministry challenges typify what many of today’s pastors experience in their callings. God speaks and we obey, but not without a bit of doubt and angst. The mission God calls us to seems daunting and impossible. Our fears and insecurities begin to quickly manifest themselves. The stress of it all becomes unmanageable, and we wonder if we will even survive so great a call. Elijah gives today’s clergy hope, as his life exemplifies the reality that, after marvelous victories and crowning moments in our pastorates, we can still be subject to unexpected distress to the point of wanting to despair of life. Prior to this experience, Elijah knew the strength of a singular mind. In our era, we have observed the rise of psychosomatic illnesses. People complain to their doctors of multiple illnesses, and they are a demonstrable proof of the power of human thinking.

⁴⁸ Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 775.

The illness may be emotional or mental in origin but may have physical symptoms. Psychosomatic illnesses are not imaginary. They are physical disorders in which both emotions and thought patterns are believed to play a central role, and they usually develop when a person's disease-fighting ability is weakened due to stress. Ministry introduces pastors and their families to a host of stresses. We must learn how to manage the pressure and problems that ministry presents to us. After a particularly stressful event, like the loss of a loved one, for example, an individual might develop high blood pressure shortly afterward or even have a heart attack. In another person, the same situation might lead to a peptic ulcer or a series of asthma attacks. A third individual, equally grief-stricken, might not get sick at all. For a psychosomatic illness to occur, a person must first be vulnerable in a particular bodily system. It is important for these illnesses to be recognized and treated as soon as they occur. How can we treat them? One effective strategy is having a singular mind that meditates on Scripture, experiences the stress release of prayer, and the fellowship of other believers. Elijah asked, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kgs 18:21). Pfeiffer writes:

‘how long halt ye between two opinions?’ (AV). Rather, *How long go ye hobbling between the two forks of the road?* Whichever translation one takes, the meaning is crystal clear. The issue was before them. A clear decision must be made. If Baal was to be god, Jehovah must be renounced. If Jehovah was to reign as God, Baal and all his worship must be forever abandoned. Many in Israel were probably tempted to compromise. Elijah, with whom no compromise was possible, saw clearly the radical character of the two issues and called for a definite decision.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Pfeiffer, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, comment on 1 Kgs 18:21.

James warns, “A double-minded man ... [is] unstable in all his ways” (Jas 1:8). Joshua challenged, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Josh 24:15). God created our minds to be far more intricate than the strongest computer—we must subject our minds to the singular control of the Holy Spirit.

New Testament Precedents

Jesus

Jesus’ life is, as John wrote, so full of learning that all the libraries of the world could not contain it (John 21:25). The Bible does note that “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb 5:8). Our ministry does not take on depth, meaning, or sincere compassion until we suffer. A pastor’s family is not a perfect one. God will use the suffering of every member of the family ultimately for his glory if we allow him. One of my pastor friends recently was broken-hearted when he learned that his son had been killed in an automobile accident on the way to serve at the church where he was employed and deeply appreciated for his creativity. The pastor was, in an instant, overcome with grief. Later, through months of prayerful reflection and continued obedience to God, that same pastor’s ministry took on a new depth and relevance to those who were hurting. It is amazing all the lessons we learn through suffering. Jesus was perfect, and God allowed him to suffer. The Lord of glory, the Creator of the universe, suffered and learned obedience by his anguish. Lea points to Jesus’ willingness:

One effort to deal with this issue has followed a special interpretation of Philippians 2:7, saying Jesus ‘emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant’ (NASB). These theologians, emphasizing the *kenosis* or self-

emptying of Christ, have argued that during his time on earth Jesus surrendered his attributes of omniscience, omnipotence (all powerful), and omnipresence (being everywhere at once).⁵⁰

When we become selfless, surrendered, and sacrificial in our attitude and behavior, we are obedient even when we suffer.

Stephen

Stephen suffered the stress of stoning:

And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:58-60).

Lest we miss the atrocity of this form of execution, Vincent tells us:

According to the Rabbis, the scaffold to which the criminal was to be led, with his hands bound, was to be twice the size of a man. One of the witnesses was to smite him with a stone upon the breast, so as to throw him down. If he were not killed, the second witness was to throw another stone at him. Then, if he were yet alive, all the people were to stone him until he was dead. The body was then to be suspended till sunset.⁵¹

Stephen’s non-retaliatory spirit captures us. Health is letting God have vengeance on our adversaries. Every pastor inherits certain church members who simply do not like him. Critics of clergy can embitter the pastor and that bitterness can spread like a cancer throughout his ministry, marriage, and family. The critical message within the prayer

⁵⁰ T. D. Lea, *Hebrews, James* (Holman New Testament Commentary 10. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 93.

⁵¹ Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Ac 7:58). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is exemplary; it is one that should guide the pastor's heart when facing criticism.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 Where there is injury, pardon;
 Where there is doubt, faith;
 Where there is despair, hope;
 Where there is darkness, light;
 And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.⁵²

Peter

Peter's denial of Christ occupies such a prominent place in all four Gospels (see Mark 14:66–72; Matt 26:69–75; Luke 22:54–71; John 18:15–18, 25–27) and is predicted by Jesus (Mark 14:27–31; Matt 26:30–35; Luke 22:31–34). The intense stress Peter felt over his threefold failure is indicated in Luke's account: "And he went out and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:62) Peter's sin and the stress that surrounds this epic event in biblical history gives hope to God's leaders who have failed. We read that Jesus prayed for Peter's restoration and saw him resuming his place of leadership: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32). Peter did return and, according to Scripture, upon doing so filled the role as a pillar of the church.

⁵² www.prayerguide.org.uk/stfrancis.htm.

Peter, one of the “pillars” of the early Church,⁵³ is often typecast as one of the most rash and impulsive of the 12 disciples. This fisherman, “Rock,” and denier of Christ possessed an irrepressible inclination to act spontaneously when involved in stressful situations. Many pastors can certainly identify with Peter when experiencing stressful times. However, additional focus should be directed toward Peter in fulfilling God’s greatest commandment with his admonition for us to love, unconditionally, those to whom we minister. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet 1:22). We cannot be healthy without love guiding us, motivating us, and reacting within us, regardless of the situation or confrontation. What does Peter mean when he says we are to love one another fervently? The well-known New Testament verb *agapaw* expresses God’s kind of love that we are to emulate. True love is an exercise of the will rather than the emotions, and it is not determined by the beauty or desirability of the object, but by the noble intention of the one who loves. Peter stresses, however, that we are to love one another fervently. MacArthur illuminates the word:

‘Fervently’ (*ektenōs*) is a physiological term meaning to stretch to the furthest limit of a muscle’s capacity. Metaphorically, the word means to go all out, to reach the furthest extent of something (Luke 22:44; Acts 12:5; cf. Acts 26:7). That is how Peter used it in 4:8 when he wrote, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” God wants believers’ love to stretch way out so it graciously forgives and covers sin among believer.⁵⁴

53 Gal 2:9.

54 John MacArthur, *1 Peter* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 90–91.

We have emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health when we love. We are called by God to love his children, our fellow brothers and sisters, for all eternity. The calling card of the true Christian is love. Through love, unrestricted, we find God's peace.

Paul

Paul's life was one of utter dependence upon God. No doubt this was the secret to his effectiveness especially when confronting stressful periods during his missionary journeys. Paul confesses the key to his dependence on Christ was a result of his "thorn in the flesh," (2 Cor 12:7):

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me (2 Cor 12:7–8).

Bible commentator Lenski reminds us that the original manuscript is a challenge to understand. "The man to whom the Lord had granted an actual visit to Paradise is the man to whom God gave a messenger of Satan to fisticuff him again and again."⁵⁵ Adding to the complication of the text is the exact meaning of this thorn. Vincent claims:

Opinions are divided between mental or spiritual and bodily trials. Under the former head are sensual desires, faint-heartedness, doubts, temptations to despair, and blasphemous suggestions from the devil. Under the latter, persecution, mean personal appearance, headache, epilepsy ... probably a bodily malady ... but its nature must remain a matter of conjecture.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 1298.

⁵⁶ Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word Studies in the New Testament* (2 Cor 12:7). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Whatever it was, and although Paul wanted to be freed of it, God used it to keep him pure, humble, and dependent. This triadic combination of spiritual characteristics is what clergy need for a lifetime of service for Jesus Christ. Even though at times we resist some weakness in our life that keeps us God-dependent, it could be exactly what is necessary to be fruitful. Jesus said, “Without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Paul’s message to the church at Rome was to not be complacent or apathetic, but instead to be confidently engaged in ministry, realizing it is the Kingdom’s work. “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, and serve the Lord” (Rom 12:11). Paul was not immune to the challenges faced in leadership along with the demands of the ministry, and he cautions us against losing zeal and fervor. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers, “When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside *were* conflicts, inside *were* fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us” (2 Cor 7:5–7, NKJV). Despite Paul’s struggles, emotional and physical, and even his despair of life at one point,⁵⁷ he remains an important role model of the way clergy can experience insurmountable earthly odds and yet remain focused on the eternal future:

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness—²⁸ besides the other things, what comes

⁵⁷ 2 Cor 1:8.

upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches (2 Cor 11:23–28, NKJV).

Modern Examples

Charles Spurgeon

When Charles Spurgeon died in January 1892, London went into mourning. Nearly 60,000 people came to pay homage during the three days his body lay in state at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Some 100,000 mourners lined the streets as a funeral parade two miles long followed his hearse from the Tabernacle to the cemetery. Flags flew at half-mast, and shops and pubs were closed. I remember standing at his graveside a few years ago in London. How could a pastor make such an impact on the world? If there is any remaining tangible evidence of the influence Spurgeon had in his day it can be found in his sermons. In particular, his printed sermons have had a monumental impact for over 100 years. There are 63 volumes of Spurgeon's sermons in print to this day. Newspapers carried his sermons on a weekly and sometimes daily basis for many years. Well over 100 million copies of those weekly sermons were sold (300 million to date). If one takes into account all of his publications, they would fill 200 large books. Even by modern estimations these numbers are staggering. People from California to New Zealand had one thing in common when they could discuss, if ever they met, the writing of C.H. Spurgeon. One could hardly recommend Spurgeon's method of sermon preparation unless one also has his spiritual and intellectual gifts. He was a voracious reader and immersed himself in the writings of the Puritans. Charles first discovered Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in his grandfather's library and would read it over 100 times before

his death. He was well read in the works of Calvin, Baxter, Owens, Gill, Fuller, and many others. In his sermons, Spurgeon quoted from the likes of Justin Martyr, Augustine, John Bunyan, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Gill, Andrew Fuller, and John Newton. By the time of his death, Spurgeon had amassed a personal library of some 12,000 volumes. The collection formerly resided at William Jewel College in Liberty, Missouri, but has recently been purchased by Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

Spurgeon's congregation grew so large that he had to rent the Music Hall in Surrey Garden. On June 7, 1891, an overflowing crowd filled this huge building. As powerful a preacher as he was, Charles Spurgeon suffered from acute depression throughout his entire ministry. As Spurgeon prayed, someone (there is debate about whether it was a prankster, an enemy of Spurgeon or a mentally deranged man) yelled, "Fire." Someone shouted that the balcony was about to collapse. Panicking people surged toward the exits. Seven people were trampled to death. Dozens more were taken to the hospital badly injured. Spurgeon collapsed, unconscious. He had to be carried from the pulpit and fell into such deep depression that he later said he doubted anyone had ever passed as close to insanity as he and yet escaped with their mind. Some say Spurgeon never got over the horror of that event.

Spurgeon offers a special warning to ministers who have gained success and notoriety. He knew what he was talking about, and this is evidenced by his extreme popularity, as the illustration above demonstrates. In a day without microphones, thousands of people, often at least five or six thousand, came to hear his commanding voice each Sunday at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Spurgeon himself wrote:

My witness is that those who are honored by their Lord in public have usually to endure a secret chastening or to carry a peculiar cross lest by any means they exalt themselves and fall into the snare of the Devil. This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry. The cloud is black before it breaks and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist heralding the nearer coming of my Lord's richer benison. So have far better men found it. The scouring of the vessel has fitted it for the Master's use. Immersion in suffering has preceded the filling of the Holy Ghost. Fasting gives an appetite for the banquet. The Lord is revealed in the backside of the desert, while His servant keeps the sheep and waits in solitary awe.⁵⁸

J. B. Phillips

In *Your God Is Too Small*,⁵⁹ J. B. Phillips (1906–1982) explains that the trouble facing many of us today is that we have not found a God big enough for our modern needs. In a world where our experience of life has grown in myriad directions, and our mental horizons have been expanded to the point of bewilderment by world events and scientific discoveries, our ideas of God have remained largely static. It is nearly impossible, Phillips argues, for an adult to worship the conception of God that exists in the mind of a child of Sunday-school age, the “God-in-a-box” notion, limiting God to such inadequate conceptions as “Resident Policeman,” “Grand Old Man,” “Meek-and-Mild,” and “Managing Director.” As a result of these insufficient ideas of God, many people live with an inner dissatisfaction, without any faith at all.

Phillips' faith was tested by the deep depression he experienced relentlessly during the last 20 years of his life. He was hailed as one of the most well-known Christian writers of his day and although his linguistic skills were significant, Phillips'

⁵⁸ Quoted on www.epm.org/blog/2007/Sep/17/third-and-final-on-spurgeon-ministry-and-depressio (accessed Mar 9, 2012).

⁵⁹ J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

depression was incapacitating. His honest autobiography, *The Price of Success*, was published the same year as *The Wounded Healer*, by Phillips' wife, Vera, and their close friend, Edwin Robertson. Together these books tell of the "other" life of J. B. Phillips, a man who loved the public eye even as he suffered from the fame that followed him. We are greatly helped in our study of God's word by the Greek interpretation of the New Testament text prepared by Phillips, and yet we do not perhaps realize that this resource was written by the pen of a man who felt the limitations of humanity and depended on God for relief.

Freddie Gage

Jim Cox wrote in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* about the impact of the ministry of Evangelist Freddie Gage:

Evangelist Freddie Gage has become a legend in his own time: Saved as a teenager in a Houston slum neighborhood, Freddie was called to preach before entering college. By the age of 25 he was preaching at some of the most successful evangelistic crusades in Southern Baptist churches in history, breaking all attendance records. No other church evangelist of the Southern Baptist Convention received such extensive coverage by both the Baptist and National press during the 1950's and 1960's. Freddie attended Decatur Baptist College and Baylor University and received an Honorary Doctor's Degree in Human Letters from California Theological Seminary. Within a few years this man was being acclaimed as an authority on youth problems and had great acceptance as a speaker in public schools. He spoke to more than two million young people in over one thousand school assembly programs.

In 40 years as a Southern Baptist evangelist, Freddie Gage has conducted more than 1350 revival crusades in churches across America. Of these, 200 have been area-wide, citywide crusades with the participation of over 10,000 churches. He has preached face to face to over ten million and to untold millions by radio and television. He has spoken in more than 3,000

schools, 300 prisons and jails, to 500 civic organizations, and 400 radio and television talk shows.

More than 1,000,000 have made professions of faith in Jesus Christ as a result of his God-given ministry. Many have become full-time evangelists, pastors, and missionaries as a result of Dr. Gage's ministry, and he has modeled a soul-winner's fire for four sons all of whom are now engaged in full-time evangelism.⁶⁰

Gage later admitted to years of battling depression, and that burden for suffering ministers and their wives moved him to found Wounded Heroes in 1997. Gage entered a hospital in 1978 suffering from depression. He described his paranoia about his treatment, uncommon at the time for a minister. He was convinced "that it would be the end of my ministry." "If I had suffered a heart attack or cancer ... God's people would have rallied around me," asserted Gage,

"but in churches, we throw stones at the spiritually, emotionally, and mentally wounded. We are legalistic, judgmental and critical. We do not practice what we preach regarding restoration ... The Christian army is the only army in the world to bury its wounded."⁶¹

Gage founded Wounded Heroes to restore ministers who have been abused by churches, suffered personal failure or fallen victim to other traumas. LifeWay, the publishing distribution arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant denomination, thought so much of the avant-garde idea that they assumed the program for their more than 40,000 pastors and churches. No pastor would be turned away for financial reasons from the ministry's counseling retreats. And Wounded Heroes will not only focus on ministerial crises but also on the prevention of problems and restoration of ministers. God used Freddie Gage to reveal that fruitful ministers suffer

⁶⁰ "About Freddie Gage," www.freddiegage.org/all_my_friends_are_dead_9.htm (accessed March 7, 2012).

⁶¹ Marv Knox, "Gage passes Heroes to LifeWay" *The Baptist Standard* (June 23, 1999) www.baptiststandard.com/1999/6_23/pages/gage.html (accessed March 7, 2012).

from depression, anxiety, isolation, and a number of other maladies. Often it is caused by sheer exhaustion and over-commitment to the work of the ministry. Had Freddie Gage not become transparent about his own health condition, LeaderCare for Southern Baptist ministers would have never seen fruition. Over 1,000 counselors were available through the numerous Baptist state convention networks, and 90 clergy care organizations through which pastors can find help and support were launched. LeaderCare trained more than 400 persons to conduct church mediations, another resource to help pastors under stress. But the initiative was short-lived.

Wounded Heroes was a worthy endeavor, however, it did not last very long. Even after the statement made by Jimmy Draper that it would last over thirty years, it lasted only two years. The planned long range goals to minister to pastors were never achieved after being included at LifeWay.⁶²

Concluding Thoughts

As previously stated, we are hard-pressed to find the term stress or depression within the biblical record; however, it is understood that God's leaders, in accomplishing great feats for God, are not immune to sadness, discouragement, mourning, troubles, and despair. These feelings are no respecter of persons. They can strike any of God's servants, afflicting the poor and the very rich, young people and older people, men and women. Both stress and success often trigger emotional letdowns and human emotion cannot be separated from the call of God upon a leader's life. David exhibits this reality after encountering stress due to loss. "When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it

⁶² Donald Q. Hicks, *A Study of the Conflicts Within Churches That Lead to the Termination of Pastors Within the Southern Baptist Convention* (D. Min. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 58.

destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So, David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep” (1 Sam 30:3–4, NIV). The prophet Elijah also exhibits the let-down sometimes experienced after great success.⁶³ One might imagine the celebration after the manifestation of God’s stunning display of power in the Mount Carmel account, along with the seizing and execution of 450 prophets of Baal. However, this success is short-lived in that shortly thereafter, Elijah, as a result of overwhelming stress, indicates to God his great desire for death.⁶⁴

⁶³ 1 Kgs 18.

⁶⁴ 1 Kgs 19:4–5.