



— At —

Full Strength

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The Complete Survival Guide Workbook
for Those Who Serve in Ministry and
Other Caregiving Vocations

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Disclaimer: This book is not intended to offer professional or medical advice, and is not a substitute for professional or medical care. Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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Introduction

This workbook has individual and small group exercises designed to help monitor personal well-being, and identify ways in which a person can reach full strength.

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: The introduction of *At Full Strength* addresses how loss of enthusiasm can fuel effectiveness in serving others. Reflect on these questions individually or in a small group setting.

- What dynamics in your life rob you of enthusiasm?
- What dynamics seem to diminish your resiliency?
- What part of your work or personal life diminishes your overall satisfaction?

1

Warning: Danger Ahead!

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Take a personal inventory to see whether you are in the crosshairs. Check the statements that are true about you right now.

- What is the total number of years you have served in a people-helping field, whether as a professional or a volunteer? If you are within six months of any of the years listed, check below.

Within 6 months of years 6–7

Within 6 months of years 21–22

Within 6 months of years 13–14

Within 6 months of years 28–29

- How many years total have you been in your current assignment? If you are within six months of any of the years listed, check below.

Within 6 months of years 6–7

Within 6 months of years 21–22

Within 6 months of years 13–14

Within 6 months of years 28–29

- Are you within a six-month range of one of these ages? Check below.

Within 6 months of age 29

Within 6 months of age 46

Within 6 months of age 32

Within 6 months of age 55

Within 6 months of age 39

Within 6 months of age 62

- Is your marriage within a six-month range of these years? Check below.

Within 6 months of years 6–7

Within 6 months of years 21–22

Within 6 months of years 13–14

Within 6 months of years 28–29

If you are in one or more crosshairs or have a colleague in the crosshairs, the exercises in the following chapters can be of great benefit to you.

Research Statistics

Here are the expanded research statistics that are excerpted in Chapter One.

Major Challenges Facing Pastors and Other Nonprofit Ministry Workers

- ⊙ 80% said being in caregiving has affected their families negatively.
- ⊙ 33% said being in caregiving has been an outright hazard to their family.
- ⊙ 90% said they were inadequately trained to cope with the demands of caregiving.
- ⊙ 70% said they have a lower self-esteem now than when they started out.
- ⊙ 37% said they have been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior.

Marriage Problems of Pastors and Other Ministry Workers

- ⊙ 81% indicated that they have had insufficient time together.
- ⊙ 64% indicated that they have had communication difficulties.
- ⊙ 53% indicated that they have had difficulty in raising their children.
- ⊙ 46% of caregiver's anger was directed at the spouse.
- ⊙ 75% of caregivers reported having experienced periods of extreme and major distress.
- ⊙ 33% seriously considered leaving the ministry or caregiving vocations for which they received training.

Career Stressors of Clergy and Church Workers

- ⊙ 94% of ministry professionals feel pressured to have the "ideal family."
- ⊙ The average ministry professional works fifty-four hours a week with only 6.8 hours of sleep per day.
- ⊙ 33% of all U.S. churches have, at some time in their past, had a pastor leave in a "forced exit."
- ⊙ 62% of ousted pastors were forced out by a church that had previously forced out one or more pastors in the past.
- ⊙ 10% of all U.S. churches, having forced out three or more pastors, are considered to be repeat offenders and will most likely force out the next pastor as well.
- ⊙ 25% of all pastors in the U.S. have experienced a forced exit at some point in their ministry career.
- ⊙ 48% of forced exits are instigated by a very small faction within the congregation, which is comprised of only 3–4% of the people.
- ⊙ 69% of forced out pastors attempted to resolve the conflict with the dissenting faction, only to find it to be ineffectual and impossible.
- ⊙ Approximately 1,500 pastors a month are leaving their pulpits for many reasons, including forced exits, low pay, burnout, and infidelity.
- ⊙ Only one out of six pastors who attended seminary (beyond college) are still in church ministry at their retirement age.
- ⊙ It has been reported by multiple mission agencies that more than 50% of the missionaries who felt they were leaving the field prematurely did so due to unresolved conflict with team members.

More Recent Research on Ministry Professionals and Their Families

(accessed December 2018)

Depression and Anxiety among Clergy:

divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/chi/Clergy%20Depression%20%26%20Anxiety%20Effort-Reward%20Imbalance_formatted%20for%20web.pdf

False Statistics on Pastors:

www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/october/that-stat-that-says-pastors-are-all-miserable-and-want-to-q.html

Healthy Clergy, Healthy Churches:

www.gbophb.org/assets/1/7/4225.pdf

Healthy Clergy Initiative Spiritually, Emotional, Physically:

www.divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/clergy-health-initiative

Lack of Support Leads to Leaving Ministry:

www.lifewayresearch.com/2016/01/12/former-pastors-report-lack-of-support-led-to-abandoning-pastorate

Pastors Are Leaving in Doves Is a Myth:

www.leadnet.org/myth-busting-pastors-are-quitting-in-doves-stats-are-entirely-wrong/

Thriving and Surviving:

www.hartfordinstitute.org/American-Congregations-2015.pdf

Early Warning Signs: Difficult Challenges Ahead!

Research Statistics

Here are the expanded research statistics that are excerpted in Chapter Two:

The Indicators and Symptom Checklist of Being in the Crosshairs

Potential Early Warning Signs in the Relationship Domain

- Lack of marital vitality
- An increase in the frequency or intensity of relational distress
- A tendency to become easily disappointed by others
- A decrease in the ability to recover from relational challenges and disappointments
- At least one bothersome relationship that is considered toxic and energy draining

Potential Early Warning Signs in the Spiritual/Moral Domain

- A return to former bad habits or getting involved in a single activity to an excess
- An increase in the level of temptation
- A diminished accountability marked by *hiddenness* and often for no particular reason
- Increased susceptibility toward *counterfeits* (something other than what God intended)
- More emotional energy invested in self-justifying rather than self-evaluating

Potential Early Warning Signs in the Emotional/Physical Domain

- Extended times of low mood, depression, and/or a diminished level of emotional or physical vitality
- Frequent somatic (physical health) complaints that might be chronic in nature
- Significant episodes of self-doubt or an elevated sense of self-importance
- Frequent episodes of concern or anxiety over one's future direction that keeps one awake at night
- Experiences of *extremes* as evidenced by feelings of boredom or making risky choices
- Easily disappointed or discouraged
- Struggling with being self-absorbed or self-focused

Potential Early Warning Signs in the Mental Focus/Life Direction Domain

- A lack of clarity in one's direction may become predominant
- A strong yearning for something new or different
- Disillusioned or disappointed with the outcome of life and/or career
- Priorities become fragmented during several of the crosshairs
- A loss of mental focus or becoming hyper-focused in one area of life to the neglect of others

Take a closer look at each of these indicators and symptoms in each domain and expand upon them. Whether in ministry or another people-helper vocation, the symptoms and indicators vary by individual. This list is an attempt to identify the common symptoms or indicators identified in the twelve-year-long Crosshairs Research. However, the list is not exhaustive.

Relational Domain

1. A lack of marital vitality was reported by a significant number of participants. The low cycles experienced at work impact the marriage as well. Small irritations and hurts become magnified. Some participants experienced a private attraction to someone outside the marriage. Most of those who committed adultery said that the relationship began while in the crosshairs.

2. Many indicated an increase in the frequency or intensity of relational distress. Those who serve in vocations of ministry and other people-helping fields know that relationships can be challenging. Being let down or betrayed by others comes with the territory. However, during the crosshairs phase, these relational disappointments seem to come with greater frequency and/or intensity. The result can be grief, low vitality, resentment, or a deep hurt. The individuals reported that they were somewhat surprised by their level of inward emotional reactivity.

3. A high percentage of the participants testified that there was a tendency to become easily disappointed by others. Feeling let down and disappointed by others is a part of being in a people-helping vocation. If a person is not prepared to deal with ongoing disappointment, he or she should consider another career direction. However, when in the crosshairs, a good number of the participants reported that their disappointment was never far away. The day-to-day challenges were becoming marked with unmet expectations.

4. Many reported a decrease in their ability to recover from relational challenges and disappointments. There was a lack of resiliency in being able to bounce back from relational disappointment that in previous years was perceived as just a part of life. For example, pastors have parishioners leave the church continuously. However, while in the crosshairs, a family leaving the church causes so much pain that the pastor wants to leave ministry altogether, never to return again. Nonprofit leaders might experience an inordinate level of grieving or even resentment when a particular coworker resigns.

5. Most had at least one significantly bothersome relationship that they considered to be toxic and consistently drained them of their emotional or relational energy. There is a tendency for long-term service to have a cumulative impact on a person's overall vitality. It is very much like running a marathon. The early miles are not a problem. However, there is an effect that all runners refer to as *hitting the wall*. The vitality drains from the runner, and every stride becomes laborious. The legs begin to feel like heavy weights rather than an asset that keeps the runner moving forward toward the goal. The crosshairs is much like hitting the wall. The difficult relationships that once seemed to be an inconvenience and interruption begin to feel toxic. Small irritations become a significant drain on the precious resources essential for effective service. Oftentimes, the challenging becomes toxic as it takes center stage emotionally in the life of the vocational people-helper.

Spiritual/Moral Domain

1. A common dynamic involved a significant percentage of the participants returning to former bad habits or getting involved in an activity to excess. Because of the lack of vitality, there was a propensity toward former bad habits that seemed to have been overcome in the years prior to the crosshairs experience. Others had become involved in an activity that seemed obsessive or compulsive in nature. The activity may not have been necessarily negative or destructive except for the fact that it was taking center stage and becoming an annoyance to the individual or others around them.

2. Many indicated a season marked with an increased level of temptation. The distractions included temptations that in previous chapters of life were easily resisted. Some found themselves involved in activities that they had never imagined being a challenge for them, or being caught off guard by a sudden onslaught of temptation and spiritual attack. There were descriptions of feeling mentally bombarded or having sudden behavior changes that were uncharacteristic of them. Some participants described *disdain* or even *self-hatred* because of their thinking and/or behavior patterns as it pertained to the temptations.

3. Most participants reported a diminished accountability marked by hiddenness, often for no particular reason. There was secrecy surrounding one's decisions, whereabouts, and activities. Oftentimes there was not even the need for hiding the behavior. Even if accountability existed at earlier times, the person's willingness to be open in accountability relationships had become shrouded in image management rather than authenticity.

4. Many testified of an increased susceptibility toward counterfeits—ways of being filled up that were less than God's best for them. There are a wide range of activities and rituals given by God for our enjoyment. However, a good number of participants indicated that they had become consumed in a positive activity that they felt was becoming unhealthy. Others reported that they had lapsed into overeating, pornography, excessive spending, or another form of addictive behavior.

5. More emotional energy was invested in self-justifying one's attitudes, decisions, and actions rather than self-evaluating. Justifying, rationalizing, excusing, blaming, and deflecting had become the way of dealing with unwise choices and actions.

Emotional/Physical Domain

1. More than one-third of the participants reported extended times of low mood and depression. Almost all of them indicated a diminished level of emotional and physical vitality. These were low times characterized by low energy emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Depression may be a stronger descriptor than many would apply to themselves. Other descriptions included: unmotivated, disparaged, discouraged, disappointed, and melancholy. Physical and emotional energy seemed to be low, and many basic tasks were experienced as laborious and possibly boring.

2. There were indications of frequent somatic (body) complaints that seemed to be chronic in nature. Being in the crosshairs can be accompanied by a wide range of physical complaints such as pain, frequent headaches, gastrointestinal distress, back pain, fatigue, or an increased susceptibility to illnesses. To the person experiencing the symptoms, they are very real but occasionally without a clear biological basis. Individuals suffering with somatic issues often show increased levels of worry and anxiety and increased reactions in response to physical symptoms. Later, we will discover this is one way that stress seeks its own expression when a person has not found an adequate way to cope.

3. Many reluctantly expressed having experienced significant episodes of self-doubt. During a crosshair season, a good number of ministry workers and other vocational people-helpers struggled with a diminished level of confidence that was usually temporary. Some found themselves second-guessing their decisions and actions with no clear reason to do so.

4. A significant number experienced frequent episodes of concern or anxiety over their future direction that kept them awake at night. For some individuals, being in the crosshairs felt as if they had lost their spiritual compass and map. Their vision for their future became foggy and unclear. Many reported that they would lay awake at night or wake up in the middle of the night thinking about their future but never quite finding resolution. They would mentally treadmill on certain issues for hours, never arriving at a decision or clear direction.

5. A significant number described having experienced life in extremes such as feelings of extreme boredom or making unusually risky choices. On one extreme, the emotion of boredom became a nagging enemy. The ventures and activities that were once highly rewarding and fulfilling in earlier years of service were becoming dull and commonplace. The compelling sense of passion and mission was dissipating like an early morning fog. On the other extreme, some individuals found themselves making risky choices that seemed to fall outside their typical mode of operating in order to compensate for the boredom. In some cases, the risky choices involved immoral behavior that resulted in a loss of credibility and gainful employment.

6. Most of the vocational people–helpers reported that they had become easily disappointed, depressed, or discouraged in their work direction or outcomes. Unmet expectations led to discouragement. Dreams and aspirations had dissolved into disappointment. For some, it was a deep sense of failure. Others experienced notable success but void of the satisfaction once anticipated in their earlier years of service.

7. Many referred to themselves as struggling with being self–absorbed or self–focused. Potentially healthy self-evaluation had deteriorated into a defeating self-absorption.

Mental Focus/Life Direction Domain

1. A lack of clarity in one’s direction was predominant in several of the crosshairs. Among the participants, there were a significant number who seemed to have lost their way as it pertains to vision and direction. The former clarity of direction was now shrouded in self-doubt. It varied with each individual as to the emotional impact of this loss of direction.

2. A good number of the vocational people–helpers shared that they had a strong yearning for something new or different in their life context. That which was formerly exciting and energizing had become commonplace. The yearning for something new at times gave rise to the exploration of new ventures within the work context or an expressed interest in a job/position change. For others, this yearning took a less constructive direction into choices and actions that were destructive, such as an inappropriate relationship.

3. Disillusioned or disappointed with the outcome of life or career seemed to pervade the experience of many. That which was formerly rewarding had become dull and uninteresting. There were statements expressed indicating a theme like, “I never imagined it would be like this!” The passionate call to serving others had dissolved into a ministry/service of the mundane.

4. There were indications that one’s priorities had become fragmented during several of the crosshairs. Along with a disillusionment or disappointment in their work direction, a good number of participants indicated that there was increasing difficulty in discerning what should be priority.

5. They indicated extremes in their state of mind as indicated by a loss of mental focus or the opposite of becoming hyper–focused in one area of their life experience. For some, concentration and focus seemed nearly impossible. Others became hyper-focused or obsessed in one aspect of their life experience. This was often called to their attention by a spouse or coworker who found it disconcerting.

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Take a personal inventory to see whether you are in the crosshairs. Look through the *early warning signs* and write down which ones may be true for you.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

What is one thing that you can do that, if you do it consistently and faithfully, will allow you to grow and benefit from identifying your early warning sign?

For further study, see Dennis Howard, director of Vitality Care Institute, LMHC, LCSW, “The Crosshairs Research Project” compiled in 2014 (Fort Wayne, IN: 2014). This study was based on data collected on 633 case records involving ministry, nonprofit, and humanitarian workers in counseling and coaching records over a twelve-year period from 2001–2013.

3

Navigating Stress: Sharp Curves Ahead!

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Take a personal inventory to identify the type of stress you may be encountering. Check all indicators that are or have been true of you in the past several weeks.

- Potent stress
- Persistent stress
- Perceptual stress
- Pervasive stress

How does stress seek its expression in your life situation?

- Exploding
- Somatization
- Underhanded
- Whipping-Post

What is one thing that you can do that, if you did it consistently and faithfully, would make all the difference in your life situation?

4

Interpersonal Encounters and the Toxic Triangle

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: The Toxic Triangle can be utilized as a helpful self-assessment tool. Think of a time that your relationships were very challenging, and apply the following exercise:

Exercise for Self-Evaluation:

- Where do I tend to enter the Toxic Triangle? On the triangle below, draw an arrow that you believe could be your entry point.
- If the situation does not improve, where do I go next? Draw another arrow that points to your second base.
- Finally, if the situation becomes worse, where do I end up over time? Draw an arrow to this point in the triangle.

Getting out and staying out of the Toxic Triangle requires action. Remember that most change begins with acknowledging the exact nature of our wrong and confessing it to God and possibly others, even though our sin may not be outwardly evident. Repentance requires *choosing* another direction. Where we enter the Toxic Triangle or find our heart attitude can suggest our direction.

- If we are trying to *fix* or *rescue*, we must choose instead to be the *trusted advisor* or *shepherd*. Fixing and rescuing is a form of manipulation or control. The trusted advisor or shepherd gives others the option to incrementally or fully accept or reject the help that is offered.
- If we are *judgmental*, we must choose to be *discerning*. Discernment is clearly judging the truth of the situation without the spirit of being judgmental. Jesus said, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). Jesus was not suggesting that we dismiss wrongdoing or abstain from being discerning. He was addressing the judgmental spirit that so often results in considerable damage and deep hurt.



- If we are feeling like a *victim* or *martyr*, we must choose to be *sacrificial*. To be truly sacrificial it must be unto the Lord. If we are truly sacrificial, we cannot in integrity say, “After all I have done for _____, this is what I get!”

Consider these thoughts as it relates to getting out and staying out of the Toxic Triangle.

Steps to Get Out and Stay Out of the Toxic Triangle

- I will seek first to understand before being understood.
- I will choose humility and demonstrate a willingness to examine my attitude by assuming that: “I am always in error. It is a matter of finding out where and to what degree.” Or, “My perception of others is always incomplete. It is a matter of where and to what degree.”
- I will recognize that when I am in the Toxic Triangle, I have a prideful heart.
- I will look for the hidden opportunity in the adversity.
- I will determine the exact nature of my responsibility and execute it with a good attitude.

Which of these steps may be the most important for you to focus on and put into practice to be more effective in your relationships?

Remember . . .

There is only one True Judge that is always just . . .
 God the Father, Omnipotent!
 There is only one True Shepherd that never bites the sheep . . .
 God’s Spirit who guides us!
 There in only one True Sacrifice that is altruistic . . .
 Jesus and his sacrifice!

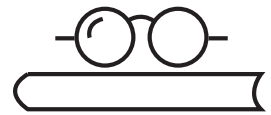
5

Confronting Difficult People

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Choose a challenging situation in your life and try on the different lenses described below. They will help you gain perspective from different vantage points and open options that may be yet unrealized.

Dark Lens: Most Negative Outlook

- ⦿ Concerning your story, what might be the worst possible scenario?
- ⦿ How likely is it that the worst scenario will happen?
- ⦿ Could you tolerate it if it were to happen?



Inverted Lens: From the Other Person's Perspective

- ⦿ What story might the other person be conveying to others? How would it be described?
- ⦿ How might the other person's story make sense to him or her? (You don't have to agree; it just has to make sense from his or her perspective.)
- ⦿ What thread of truth might there be in his or her story as it pertains to you? (What truth may make the story believable to him or her?)

Rear-View Lens: View Based on Past Experience

- ⦿ Our past experience *always* influences our current view of a situation. So *how* are your past experiences affecting your current perspective on the situation?
- ⦿ In what ways might your reaction or response be intensified by past experiences?

Wide-Angle Lens: Wisdom of Others

- ⦿ Think of several people who you consider both wise and mature. How would they view the same situation?
- ⦿ How do you believe these wise and mature people would act in the exact same situation? What would they say or not say? What would they do or not do?

Bright Lens: Optimistic Outlook

- ⦿ What opportunity may be hidden below the surface or still unrealized in your challenging situation?
- ⦿ What might be the benefits of both recognizing and acting on the opportunity?

Based on this chapter, what is one thing that when confronting you need to do differently that can make all the difference in your life situation?

6

Mastering Effective Confrontation Strategies

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Now it is time to put into practice the paradigms, postures, and procedural strategies you've learned in this chapter, plus several more. But keep in mind that they are not intended to be a step-by-step solution to dealing with the challenges of working with difficult people and circumstances. However, they are the attitudes and practices that so many clients have taught me over the years. They have been found to be helpful, and others have benefited greatly.

Putting It All into Practice

Sometimes it is a small change in our attitude, perspective, or behavior that can produce tremendous fruit. Putting them into practice is much like a physical training program. *Incremental steps are better than grand failure!*

Here is the challenge:

- What is the one thing that you can do in each area that, if you did it faithfully and consistently, would make a significant difference in your work and private world?
- What paradigms, postures, or procedural strategies (listed on the following pages) would be beneficial for you to put into practice?

Paradigms

- ___ Anthropologist Paradigm: Be a student of others
- ___ Enlightenment Paradigm: Confronting vs. bringing to light that valuable information
- ___ Civility Paradigm: Choose regard when it seems impossible to respect the other person
- ___ Grace with Truth Paradigm: Having to speak into the life of others may be an idol
- ___ Ownership Paradigm: Owning your part in the problem, even if it is only 1 percent (see page 21)
- ___ Helpful Bad News Paradigm: The bad news of criticism is not always bad (see page 22)

Postures

- ___ Be *teachable* and not just *learn-able*
- ___ Respectfully *consider*, not rudely *counter*
- ___ Be *propositional*, not *positional*
- ___ Be discrete, using the NBA concept to determine who should know and why
- ___ Accept the Envelope Principle (see page 23)
- ___ Be aware of the Triangulation Trap (see page 24)

Process Strategies

- ___ Note the importance of esteeming others
 - ___ Utilize the Candor Continuum and dispense information wisely
 - ___ Exercise the process of bracketing
 - ___ Confront incongruence
 - ___ Master the art of prefacing your comments (see page 26)
 - ___ Recognize the power of the appeal (see page 27)
-
- ⊙ When and where would it be most beneficial to put them into practice?
 - ⊙ Who will you give permission to hold you accountable to stay the course?

ADDITIONAL PARADIGMS, POSTURES and PROCESS STRATEGIES

PARADIGMS

Ownership Paradigm: Own Your Part of the Problem, Even if It Is Only 1 Percent

Owning 100 percent of your part of a problem is essential for solving any challenge. It is the one part in a difficult situation that you have the power to do something about. This can be difficult for some of us who are assumed to be an expert in relationships. Pride sets in, and we feel the compulsion to control the situation. But control in the form of advising, appeasing, coercing, convincing, accommodating, and being a pleaser will not work for long. Other people may agree outwardly and convince us we did an adequate job. Then they will likely do what they want anyway.

If we have to always be right, then we are insecure. Show me a person who can say, “I’m sorry; I was wrong,” and I will show you someone of great character. When we have to be right, have the last word, or win in every case, it reveals how deeply insecure we really are.

There are so many ugly situations that could be turned around by one sentence. But most people act like they will choke to death on the words: “Please forgive me. That was wrong of me!”

With some maturing and practice, any of us can find within us to say the words, “I am sorry! Let me see if I can approach this in a more thoughtful way!” In learning to say this to clients when I have failed them, instead of losing respect, I’ve found that their respect grows even stronger.

It always helps to self-evaluate as to how we might be part of the problem instead of putting it totally on the other person. It is an extremely rare situation that one person is 100 percent of the problem. Even if we are only 1 percent of the problem, understanding and correcting that 1 percent may result in exponential growth in our own life. It may be the 1 percent we have been resisting since childhood. It may be the 1 percent that blocks us from experiencing significant growth in many areas of life.

Even if the difficult person has a low view of me, it is important to know how they perceive me to be the problem. Bad news can still be valuable information. If the difficult person thinks ill of me, he or she likely represents a certain percentage of all the people I encounter. Maturity is measured by how well we deal with our most difficult relationships and challenging circumstances. As Jesus said:

How can you say to your brother, “Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,” when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. (Luke 6:42)

If we have any self-respect, it is always beneficial to consider the possibility that, in some way, we *are* part of the problem, even if only 1 percent. There is always a higher and better way to deal with difficult situations. That 1 percent may be at the root of many of life’s challenges. Why not deal with it?

Helpful Bad News Paradigm: The Bad News of Criticism Is Not Always Bad

I don’t like white elephant gift exchanges. It’s those parties where everyone wraps as a gift something that is mostly suited for the trash pile. On those occasions, where you have to endure the white elephant gift exchange, one may be tempted to stow away the gift received under a chair or couch at the home of the party host!

This is similar to how many people prefer to deal with criticism: doing whatever they can to avoid having to take it home with them. Negative news about ourselves is difficult to receive and consider. Every fiber of our human nature wants to reject such bad news as unfair, untrue, or unreasonable.

Keep in mind that people in leadership have a *criticism target* on them. People feel totally free to criticize a leader behind his or her back. Just listen to it in a coffee shop or in the snack room at work. When people talk about their leaders, they do so with the demeanor of an expert analyst.

Leaders who cannot even *consider* negative feedback end up making themselves culpable. If leaders ignore feedback often enough, people eventually stop offering it. Hearing nothing to the contrary, they begin to assume all is well or that any low morale is due to those who can’t seem to get on board with the leadership team.

There are at least three reasons why those in leadership do not get clear and truthful feedback.

First, many people are reluctant to give frank feedback to those who have *positional* authority, because the price may be too high if the feedback is misunderstood or rejected.

Second, leaders may not get honest feedback because other people assume they will categorize their feedback as *wrong*.

Third, leaders do not get accurate feedback because they do not ask. When we coach leaders to ask for feedback, we suggest they ask for both positive and negative feedback from subordinates. First ask, “What is one thing I do that is generally helpful in our relationship?” Then ask, “What is one thing I can work on to improve our working relationship?” As a leader, always assume there is something that can be improved no matter how positive the relationship.

Consider this paradigm: The bad news of criticism is not always bad. If we view and accept criticism as a gift, then it is easier to find the hidden opportunity that lies beneath the surface of criticism. There is an old proverb of unknown origin that states: “Keep your friends close and your enemies even closer, because they will tell you the truth about yourself.”

Here are some of the opportunities that can arise out of criticism:

- Choosing an attitude of receptivity toward wrongful or negative comments can serve as the catalyst for incredible insight and character growth.
- The negative opinion a certain individual has toward you, whether right or wrong, may represent the sentiment of a minority of those people you encounter on a regular basis.
- Knowing clearly the exact nature of the current criticism can help you more effectively navigate a challenging situation or difficult person in the future.
- Even malicious, unfair, and inaccurate criticism often has a *thread of truth* that makes it believable to the critic however miniscule it may be.
- Finding and accepting the *thread of truth* in the criticism, and then making the appropriate adjustments, may actually serve you well in many of your relationships.
- Criticism that elicits a strong emotional reaction and resistance in you may be a clue to an area of your life that needs to be examined and matured.

When you hear bad news, intentionally choose to *consider* the uncomfortable information instead of *countering* the information.

Our *resistance* to bad news about us says as much about us as it does the other person. Just think about it this way. When you are met with criticism, it would be wise to view it as the other person giving you the code or password to growth. In a way, people are giving their perceived enemy their emotional social security and credit card number. To lean into the challenge and consider the small truth embedded in the unfair statement may be a springboard for an entirely new opportunity for exponential growth.

POSTURES

Accepting the Envelope Principle

The dynamic that is referred to as the *Envelope Principle* comes out of the church employment concept. It seems to apply to nonprofit organizations to some degree. It is especially helpful when a person is interviewing and considering a new position.

The Envelope Principle involves adding up the total number of years a position in a church or organization has existed and then dividing it by the number of people who have filled the position. Let's look at two examples:

Example #1: You are interviewing for a senior pastor position of a church that has been in existence for forty-three years. The person who just resigned was the fourth senior pastor.

- The founding pastor served nine years and moved onto a larger church.
- The second pastor served in the senior pastor position ten years after a stint of being the youth pastor.
- The church then recruited a third senior pastor who left after eleven years.
- The current pastor resigned after serving in the senior position for thirteen years.

This means there is approximately a ten- to eleven-year envelope of service time. That is approximately how long you can expect to last in the position if you do well. The senior pastor may last this long even if his performance is less than stellar as long as there is no moral failure. This is actually a fairly encouraging envelope or time period to serve.

Contrast this with the second example.

Example #2: You are interviewing for a senior pastor position in a moderate-size church that has been in existence for forty-nine years. The church pastor who just resigned under duress was the church's eleventh pastor, and the church has gone through four pastors in the previous fifteen years.

This church likely has an expected envelope of four to five years in the senior pastor position. Why would a person that is in his or her mid-fifties ever desire the position with full knowledge that the opportunity will be short-lived?

The Envelope Principle is determined by the organizational culture. It determines the amount of time that those involved can tolerate a leader. Within churches and certain nonprofit organizations, there seems to be a somewhat predictable life span within certain positions. Usually the leader begins to feel discounted, pushed out, oppressed, or apathetic after a predictable duration of time. The people within the culture tend to terminate, ask for the resignation of the individual, or just make him or her miserable.

Awareness of the Envelope Principle can spare a person unnecessary heartache. We have consulted with churches and organizations that are filled with very good people but to whom we would never refer a potential candidate for a key position. Why? Because regardless of how effective the individual may be, he or she is not likely to last long, unless the leadership within the church or organization addresses the culture and core issues surrounding their envelope.

If you are considering a key position within a nonprofit, church, or people-helping organization, before accepting the position, it would be good to investigate the longevity of those who preceded you. All too often, we have met nonprofit leaders and pastors who have moved more than a thousand miles to accept a "well-suited" position to find themselves miserable just months into the new job.

Being Aware of the Triangulation Trap

Part of living in a fallen world is that we all want to feel justified in our perspectives and actions. If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we want others to agree with the *rightness* of our perspective. We want to feel fully justified in our behaviors. Because of this dynamic, there is

always the danger of *triangulation*. Triangulation takes place when we behave in such a way as to win someone over to our side against another.

It is easy to excuse our bad behavior when we perceive our fundamental intentions as good. A professional colleague who serves as a court judge once told me that the words often heard in court are, “Your Honor, but I did not intend to . . . !” My judicial friend frequently replies, “I don’t concern myself with your intentions. You committed the crime, so you must pay the consequences.”

In the legal courtroom, *good intentions* do not justify *bad behavior*. But we somehow live our daily lives as if our good intentions cover a multitude of sin. This is nothing more than the wolf of depravity fully dressed in sheepskins. We are self-deceived when we expend more time and emotional energy justifying our attitude and actions than we do in self-examining our heart. This capacity to self-justify sets a trap for the unsuspecting clergy and other vocational people-helpers. Beware of the Triangulation Trap.

Self-justification demands that we find another who will agree with and affirm us. It begins with telling the story of our grievance, carefully justifying the magnitude of our insight. You can often see this in action in a coffee shop. Two or three people are diagnosing a problem in the workplace, at home, or in the church, with what they have convinced themselves is the most correct perspective. Each has his or her “expert” perspective on what is wrong and what should be done.

Have you ever been fully convinced by an argument—until you heard the perspective from the other person’s vantage point? Then, the event that caused the grievance looks significantly different.

Triangulation is generally a subliminal strategy to elicit the support of someone against another person. It is a way of getting someone to be on your side. Though this seems underhanded, if we are honest with ourselves, we have all been guilty of triangulating.

So what is an effective way to handle triangulation? How can we diminish the negative impact of triangulation? Here are a few suggestions:

- Listen to understand, *not* to agree or disagree.
- Abstain from choosing sides, as tempting as it might be. When you do so, you become part of the problem. Rather, choose repentance, reconciliation, restoration, and renewal.
- Ask the person attempting to triangulate whether he or she has gone directly to talk with the person with whom he or she has a concern.
- Ask the person what he or she thinks might be the story from the other person’s perspective against whom he or she has a grievance.
- Esteem the person, extend grace, and speak truthfully. Let the person know that your desire is to reach a satisfactory solution and not take a side.
- Guard against conversation that expands beyond NBA—that which is necessary, beneficial, and appropriate.
- Suggest that together you have a conversation with all involved so that everyone hears the same comments. This eliminates the embellishments and distorted perspectives based on “he said, she said.”

We all have been guilty of triangulating. However, some people we encounter live in a *pattern* of triangulating. It is their mode of operating as a means to control people and circumstances to boost their own sense of self-esteem. If they are continually doing this to win people over to their point of view, they are likely triangulating against you as well. My advice is to keep a safe distance. You

are probably not the one who is going to bring to light the valuable information that will contribute to their personal growth until they first recognize the destructiveness of their triangulation as a style of relating.

PROCESS STRATEGIES

Master the Art of Prefacing Your Comments

Many leaders in the people-helping vocations, including clergy, are endowed with strong personalities. It seems to come with the territory. There are those occasions that the kindest and most carefully presented comments are greeted with defensiveness, taking offense, and possibly even hostility. This may have as much or more to do with their issues than how your comment was made. Some of us as leaders have personality styles that are much like a rushing river. When the news is enthusiastic, people are encouraged and want to follow. However, when the news is unpleasant, there can be a strong and negative reaction.

A story is told about a master chef who believed he could get people to eat just about anything if it was served well. Being very gifted in the culinary arts, he once said, "You can serve dog food to a connoisseur of fine food if you serve it right!" To prove his point, the chef would do that very thing. At elegant parties, he would serve hors d'oeuvres made from various vitamin-enriched dog foods. Then he would keep count of the people who commented on his tasty appetizers and requested the recipe. He just referred to it as his secret ingredient.

The same holds true when serving less-than-pleasant news to others. You can serve bad news when it is delivered on the platter of grace. Anyone needing to deliver bad news would benefit from mastering the art of *prefacing your comments*. This is even more the case if you are endowed with a strong personality, as is often the case with leaders. Prefacing preserves the dignity of other people while valuing their perspective. Prefacing softens the impact to avoid their feeling like they are facing the tip of the spear. Here are some prefacing comments that make painful information more palatable:

- "Correct me if I am in error, my perspective is . . ."
- "I could be in error, however, I need to say . . ."
- "I may be missing something from my perspective, however, I believe it is important for you to know . . ."
- "I am wondering if you can clarify something for me. How I view this is . . ."
- "Can you expand on this for me, as what I am seeing is . . ."
- "I want to share something with you that will probably require some time for you to think it through before responding."
- "I'm no friend to you if I don't let you know that . . ."
- "If our roles were reversed, I would hope you would tell me that . . ."

The art of prefacing places value on the other person, and it allows room for disagreement. It also gives the other person time to consider the comments. It does not sound like it is your last and final position. It opens the opportunity for exploration.

Recognizing the Power of the Appeal

Confronting is a bad word in the minds of many people. In fact, on assessments as part of our Five Conflict Management Styles survey, approximately 62 percent of our population score the highest or second highest on *avoiding*. This seems to correlate with the divorce rate that is estimated at 63 percent.

However, confronting can be a powerful tool when we think of it as being *collaborative*. When there is a high value placed on the person being confronted and the benefit to that person is considered, the outcomes can actually be quite fruitful. Collaboration is based on the belief that *together* we can come up with a better idea than we ever could *on our own*. Far too often, the benefits of confronting are one-sided.

Before confronting another person, remember that it may be helpful to view it as *bringing to light valuable information*. Consider how you might esteem the other person, making room for grace as you present him or her with the truth. Keep it in mind that truth without grace is potentially cruel, and grace without truth is misleading. Both truth and grace without esteeming the other person has potential to be a manipulation.

When confronting, there can be power in an appeal when we invest some time in exploring what might be all the benefits to the individual being confronted. What does he or she stand to gain if willing to consider the appeal added to the confrontation? The power of the appeal is encouraging the other person to join you in pursuing the highest and best for all concerned. The power of the appeal is declaring, “If you can work on (insert attitude and behavior), then you and others will benefit by (insert outcomes)!”

A confrontation with the power of an appeal is much more difficult to reject by the person to whom it is directed. Why? Because embedded in the confrontation is a benefit for the person who is being confronted.

7

Self-Deception and Moral Failure: “It Will Never Happen to Me!”

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: *Who has your ear?* Who do you willingly allow to speak truth into your life?

With whom are you most vulnerable as it pertains to the self-talk, “It will never happen to me”? Who is it? What is the dangerous setting or activity? What conversations, emails, or texts might be considered inappropriate or risky by those people in your life you consider wise?

Who in your circle of relationships are you willing to give the permission to ask the tough spiritual questions? What are the questions that would be important to ask? Who has your spiritual well-being as their concern? Again, who do you willingly allow to speak truth into your life?

In what ways might I be expending more energy in self-justifying rather than self-evaluating?

Who or what am I blaming rather than taking ownership of my part of the problem? Where might there be hiddenness in my life? What are the areas of life where I lack accountability?

Over the years, we have collected numerous accountability questions that can serve as a personal and spiritual audit. They have been gifts from many people and can serve to catalyze your endeavor to create your own list of accountability questions.

My Personal and Spiritual Audit

Continue reflecting on these questions:

- ⊙ Am I involved in relationships that reflect a healthy accountability?
- ⊙ Am I content with *who* I am becoming?
- ⊙ Is obedience in small matters built into my reflexes?
- ⊙ Is my focus more on *doing* or *being*?
- ⊙ Do I have a *Mount of Olives*—a place of quiet reflection in my life?
- ⊙ Is my *spiritual feeding* the right diet for me? How might it need to change?
- ⊙ Is my prayer life improving? How does it need to be changed?
- ⊙ Am I free of bitterness or resentment?
- ⊙ Is my humility genuine? Where in my life might I lack a *teachable* spirit?
- ⊙ Does my family recognize the authenticity of my spirituality?
- ⊙ Could I clearly identify and articulate the primary concerns of my spouse in the past seventy-two hours?
- ⊙ In what ways am I recognizing God’s work through the adversities of my life?
- ⊙ How willing am I to admit shortcomings and to whom?
- ⊙ Do I recognize God’s grace and blessings in daily living?
- ⊙ Do I have an *attitude of gratitude*?

Recognizing God’s Current Work in My Life

- ⊙ Where have I seen God’s faithfulness in recent days?
- ⊙ In what area of my life am I having a difficult time trusting God even though he is absolutely faithful?
- ⊙ What actions in my life would demonstrate a deeper trust in God?
- ⊙ What areas of life tend to busy my mind and distract me from hearing the voice of God’s Spirit?
- ⊙ When last have I spent more than three hours in solitude in order to listen to God?

- ⦿ What interest in my life has the potential to become an idol?
- ⦿ What has God been teaching me this past week?
- ⦿ What character quality is God currently shaping in me?
- ⦿ In what recent hardship has God been teaching me?
- ⦿ What is the current lesson plan God is implementing in my life?

What accountability questions would be important to ask based on your current life situation?

Where in your life might you need to be more intentional in order to grow and mature? Who has your spiritual well-being as their concern? Again, who do you willingly allow to speak truth into your life?

Write down your personal audit and accountability questions:

Incongruence: Pride, Humility, and Idolatry

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Instead of assuming you have no form of idolatry in your life, let's assume for a moment that you do have some kind of idol on the mantle of your life. **If so, what might it be?**

What is one thing that you can do that would help address the issue of possible idolatry in your life? If you addressed it consistently and faithfully, how would it make a difference in your life and relationship with God?

Mistakes, Failures, and Other Disappointments

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE:

So how do you respond to the mistakes and disappointments that come your way? Is your response one that can maintain your personal vitality, or do you react in such a way that it robs you of vitality? Pause for a moment and take inventory of both the healthy and unhealthy ways that you respond or react to mistakes and disappointments.

Based on the unhealthy reactions listed in the chapter, how do you react to mistakes and disappointments in ways that might rob you of vitality?

Based on the healthy responses listed in the chapter, what would be a healthy response that you need to adopt as a way of dealing with mistakes and disappointments?

Fill out the hero quiz. It can be an encouragement to you to realize that many of the heroes in history also confronted incredible disappointment and made serious blunders. Many of them were seen as fools for positions and choices they made at the time, but some of the so-called “mistakes” actually turned out for the good.

The Hero Quiz

These individuals who left their mark in the pages of history all had two things in common:

- ⦿ They all faced incredible obstacles (disappointments and/or mistakes).
- ⦿ They all risked appearing foolish (because of their shortcomings or their sacrificial commitment to a cause greater than themselves).

How many heroes can you identify?

1. ____ POLITICS: His wife’s mental illness was a burden for both of them. He lost a child who took ill and died. He ran for public office nine times and lost seven times. He led his country through its darkest years, with many thinking him to be a fool. He holds his spot among the most abused national leaders in the history of America.

2. ____ MEDICINE: This person was chief of surgery at his hospital in the 1840s. At that time, women were dying following childbirth at epidemic proportions due to infections. This doctor was fanatically urging pregnant women he met on the street to use a midwife instead of a physician. He had discovered what we now know as germs, but the medical community balked at his discovery. Acceptance of the presence of germs did not come until forty years later. This lonely doctor went crazy as the result of a brain infection that started in a cut on his hand. He died in an insane asylum with the same infection as those he tried to save.

3. ____ HOSPITAL REFORM: This person was born into incredible wealth but chose a career working medically with the poor in slums of Europe and soldiers on the battlefield. On one occasion, this person was faced with helping wounded soldiers whose bodies covered four square miles in an open meadow. This person brought respect to nursing and revolutionized hospitals around the world.

4. ____ FAITH: This person suffered from an obsessive-compulsive disorder so severe that at times he thought he was blaspheming God when he dropped his ink pen. From prison, he wrote the most read book in history, second only to the Bible: *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

5. ____ SCIENCE: This little German boy was thought of as mentally disabled in grade school and had very few friends, but he was actually a genius who suffered with what we now know is attention deficit disorder. This person’s theories changed the world forever. But in the peak of his career, he regretted he had ever been born. He was once quoted as having said, “I made one great mistake in my life, when I signed the letter to President Roosevelt recommending that the atom bomb be made.”

6. ____ MUSIC: The famous composer Joseph Haydn gave up teaching this person because he was too slow mentally. He suffered with a manic-depressive disorder and had a venereal disease from the time he was conceived. In middle age, he had a total loss of hearing. For several hundred years now his name has been synonymous with classical music.

7. ____ TECHNOLOGY: Today he would be diagnosed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This person was almost deaf in one ear after being thrown from a train by the conductor for being an obnoxious brat. He was often made fun of regarding many of his far-fetched and silly ideas—ideas that eventually changed history. We owe much of our technological advancement to this person.

8. ____ AVIATION HISTORY: This father was a church bishop who was known for his cynical and angry comment, “If God had intended for man to fly, he would have given us wings!” But the father’s cynicism did not quench his sons’ enthusiasm. They later launched a career numbered among the first pilots in history.

9. ____ SOCIAL REFORMER: This person’s refusal to give up a bus seat sparked a firestorm that eventually changed our national attitude concerning human rights.

10. ____ WARTIME ORATOR: This person was hated by his father, rejected by his mother, beat by his boarding school headmaster, and ridiculed by other kids. He was hyperactive and bore the ridicule that came as a result of his stuttering when he talked. He eventually became one of the world’s greatest orators who imparted to his countrymen the courage to face the hideous tyrant Adolf Hitler.

11. ____ MOTIVATOR FOR THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED: This person was paralyzed from the neck down because of a diving accident in her teen years. Overcoming self-pity, this person became America’s leading advocate for the physically challenged.

12. ____ CHURCH REFORMER: This person lived in hiding most of his adult life, suffering from severe depression likely caused by a gall bladder problem. Society would have lost the light of the gospel message that was being suppressed by taxes in the form of penance if this person hadn’t taken a stand.

13. ____ MEDICAL RESEARCH: In 1924, this brilliant but risky surgeon believed that major surgery could be done under a local anesthesia, but he could not find a willing patient to prove his theory. He eventually performed an appendectomy under a local anesthesia on a brave and willing patient: himself.

14. ____ SPORTS: In the 1924 Paris Olympic Games, this person stirred a generation with his principled refusal to run on Sunday. Instead, he won the 400-meter dash, not his customary race, and proved to the world he was the fastest man alive. He went on to serve as a missionary in war-torn China, deliberately walking away from fame and glory that could have been his in Britain. This person was known as Uncle Eric by the children who lived in the Japanese concentration camp where he died several weeks before their liberation at the end of WWII. He is the main character in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*.

15. ____ CORPORATE LEADER: This person's New England clothing mill burned to the ground in December 1995, leaving many without jobs and impacting the community economically. A consultant told him to collect his insurance and retire, since he was already way past retirement age. Instead, he determined to rebuild for the good of his employees. While rebuilding, he tried to keep them productive and paid them through the months of no work. This unselfish move caught the eye of corporate America, and his business became internationally recognized. He is the president and owner of Malden Mills, creator and manufacturer of Polartec winter clothes.

16. ____ COMMUNICATIONS: He was burned at the stake in London as a heretic. But his life gave rise to the most expansive language translation project in the history of the human race. Because of this person, the Bible has been translated into English and thousands of other languages.

17. ____ MISSIONS: This person's spouse, as a missionary, was slaughtered by the Auca Indians in South America, along with four other missionaries in the 1950s. This person, along with their children, courageously returned to continue the missionary work following the brutal murder.

18. ____ SOCIAL REFORMER: This person suffered with depression and as a young man considered suicide at one point. But later, he inspired a nation to radically move from hate to love for their neighbor.

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Ighes Semmelvise | J. Eric Liddell |
| B. Albert Einstein | K. Thomas Edison |
| C. Abraham Lincoln | L. Martin Luther |
| D. Aaron Feuerstein | M. Joni Eareckson Tada |
| E. John Bunyon | N. Winston Churchill |
| F. Evan O'Neill Kane | O. Florence Nightingale |
| G. Ludwig van Beethoven | P. Orville & Wilber Wright |
| H. Rosa Parks | Q. Elisabeth Elliot |
| I. John Wycliffe | R. Martin Luther King Jr. |

18-R	15-D	12-I	9-H	6-G	3-O	
17-Q	14-J	11-M	8-P	5-B	2-A	
16-T	13-F	10-N	7-K	4-E	1-C	Key:

It's been said that Thomas Edison defined success in these words: "Successful people are those who are willing to endure more failed attempts."

People who succeed are those ordinary people who learn powerful lessons from failed attempts and disappointments. They can find the hidden opportunity in the most disparaging circumstances of life. They put their trust in the Lord and step out in faith against what seems to be impossible odds.

Danger: The Challenge of Anger

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: Utilizing the **Anger Trigger List** below, try to identify the triggers of your anger. Knowing your triggers will help you manage anger more effectively. Remember, anger means something really matters to you. We get angry only about the things that matter to us. However, if the issue seems silly, it is likely something symbolic like trust, respect, fairness, etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Anger Trigger List

- ___ Someone says or tells you that you did something wrong.
- ___ Another person speaks ill of you.
- ___ Your spouse says that you haven't been doing enough at home.
- ___ You get stuck in traffic.
- ___ You are delayed or late for something important.
- ___ Someone interrupts you.
- ___ You are already overwhelmed, and the responsibilities keep coming.
- ___ You want something, but you can't have it now.
- ___ Someone tries to tell you how to run your life.
- ___ An employee doesn't respect your authority.
- ___ You are told that you can't do something, or someone corrects you.
- ___ Someone asks for your opinion and then immediately rejects it.
- ___ A personal goal or agenda is thwarted.
- ___ You receive put-downs from others.
- ___ Someone talks behind your back.
- ___ You are accused of doing something you didn't do.
- ___ You get caught doing something you shouldn't have been doing.
- ___ You are pushed aside when you are asking for help.
- ___ The other person disagrees with you on a very important matter.
- ___ Another person just takes over the situation (overrules you).

- Your child does something foolish.
- Your spouse or child doesn't listen to you.
- Something unexpected happens that messes up your plans.
- Other: _____

Of the thousands of potential triggers, what do you suppose is behind your triggers? What in your history may have created them?

Utilizing the **Underlying Themes of Your Anger** below, can you identify your underlying themes? Doing so will allow you to be a more effective manager of your strong emotions. It will help you clarify what truly matters to you that are the cause of the strong emotions.

Underlying Themes of Your Anger

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespected | <input type="checkbox"/> Devalued | <input type="checkbox"/> Unloved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dismissed | <input type="checkbox"/> Inconvenienced | <input type="checkbox"/> Unkind |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manipulated | <input type="checkbox"/> Judged incompetent | <input type="checkbox"/> Overlooked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unfair | <input type="checkbox"/> Thwarted | <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> "Here we go again!" | <input type="checkbox"/> Pained |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shamed | <input type="checkbox"/> Made to feel guilty | <input type="checkbox"/> Put down |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Used | <input type="checkbox"/> Disgraced | <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____ | | |

We can maintain vitality, sustainability, and resiliency when we are not being wasteful of our energy resources (spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and physically) by trying to exercise control over things that we cannot control. In reality, any type of control other than self-control is an illusion, and self-control is an uphill marathon. In the space below, write down several of your concerns, and then identify whether each concern is something you can control, influence, or just need to accept.

CONCERNS

CONTROL

INFLUENCE

ACCEPT

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What change of perspective needs to take place? What should be the focus of your prayers? Where in your life might you be diminishing your sphere of influence by your attempts to control? Finding the appropriate sphere (control, influence, or accept) can make a significant difference in the amount of emotional, spiritual, and relational energy that is expended. It can also reduce worry, fear, and anxiety.

Depression and Worry Sickness

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: What are the *early warning signs* that your vitality is declining and you are quickly losing your resiliency? What are your earliest warning signs of diminishing vitality? Is it in the physical domain, with low energy or sleep difficulties? Is it in your attitude or relationships? To get started, you may want to write down your *early warning sign* in each of these aspects of life:

- ⦿ Physical: Where in your body do you first see the impact of stress (e.g., sleeping difficulties)?
- ⦿ Mental Attitude: What is the shift in your general outlook (e.g., irritable or oversensitive)?
- ⦿ Relational Dynamics: How are your closer relationships impacted by your diminishing vitality (e.g., your family senses that you are distant or self-absorbed)?
- ⦿ Spiritual Life: What happens to your prayer life and spiritual feeding (e.g., your prayer life becomes nonexistent except in moments of desperation)?

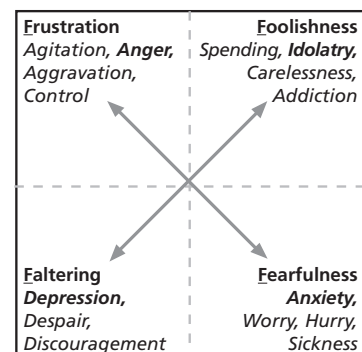
What happens in your heart when life is not treating you well?

Consider these questions:

- ⦿ *Where does your heart go* when you do not feel loved, respected, or appreciated?
- ⦿ The *absence of what* causes you to want to give up?
- ⦿ The *fear of what* makes you tentative rather than courageous?
- ⦿ The *need for what* robs you of joy in your work and life?

What is your heart direction when life is not meeting your expectations?

It would be good to identify your primary and secondary directions. Fearfulness and behaving foolishly are rarely my challenge. However, faltering (becoming discouraged) and then becoming frustrated (angry) are my nemesis. What is the tendency of your heart? Note it on the chart with an arrow. Then ask what it would look like for you to go to the Stream of Living Water instead of a broken well (Jer. 2:13).



What is your primary heart direction when you are not trusting God?

What is your secondary heart direction when you are not trusting God?

What is one thing that you can do that, if you did it faithfully and consistently, would make all the difference in your life?

Recommended Reading on Developing a Personal Mission Statement

- Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life* has some very helpful questions and suggestions in developing a purpose/mission statement.
- Stephen Covey’s two books *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First* are both helpful guides in developing a personal mission statement.
- John Ortberg’s *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* addresses the issues surrounding purpose and mission.
- Gary Keller’s book *The One Thing* is helpful on getting unstuck as it pertains to a person’s mission.

Clarity of our call, mission, and vision can help us maintain the personal vitality necessary as we navigate the more challenging chapters of our life.

Recommended Reading on Depression and Grief

Consider these books if depression or grief is a struggle for you, a family member, or a coworker.

- *Dark Clouds, Silver Lining* by Archibald Hart, PhD, is a tremendous overview of depression from the vantage point of a Christian.
- *Unmasking Male Depression* by Archibald Hart, PhD, explains the unique differences of male depression that fall outside the typical diagnostic criteria. It is full of helpful strategies including what to do and not do as a marriage partner.
- *How to Rise Above Depression* by Dr. Charles Shepson is among the finest works on depression, written by a minister who consulted with a number of counselors and psychiatrists. It is based on Elijah's depression and how God dealt with Elijah.
- *Lies Young Women Believe* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss is a very encouraging book written by a single woman in ministry. Nancy presents her case with a practical, common sense approach.
- *Telling Yourself the Truth* by William Backus and Marie Chapien addresses the negative self-talk that contributes to depression and anxiety.
- *When the Darkness Will Not Lift* by John Piper is a refreshing book written by a minister concerning what to do as we wait upon the Lord and wait for joy to come.

Expanded Information of God's Natural Antidepressants

God's Antidepressants

- **Natural Light:** Exposure to natural light on the skin and the retina of the eyes affects the melatonin in our body as well as the level of Vitamin D, which is essential for mood health. Sunlight has a direct impact on brain chemistry, contributing to a more positive mood. It is because of a lack of exposure to natural light that some people experience a condition called seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a low-grade depression that seems to persist during the time of the year with less daylight.
- **Hugs:** Being hugged by someone we want to receive hugs from actually releases endorphins into our body, increasing our mood stability. However, being hugged by someone we do not wish to receive the attention from can have the opposite impact. Several decades ago, a German life insurance company discovered in a research project that those men who hug and kiss their wives twice a day live between five to six years longer than those who do not. There was no corresponding research indicating that it extends the wife's life span and health, but there was no contraindication suggesting it would shorten a woman's life span.
- **Exercise:** Regular exercise of twenty minutes or more three times a week can contribute greatly to the improvement of mood. It causes the quickest release of endorphins into the bloodstream giving an immediate antidepressant affect.

- ◎ **Sexual Intimacy:** Sexual intimacy in the context that God intended it is the strongest release of endorphins into the body other than illegal drugs. When we are sexually intimate in the context that God intended it (guilt-free), it can have a powerful antidepressant impact, as the release of endorphins impacts the serotonin level in the brain in a positive way. The problem is that depressed people often lose interest in sexual intimacy or sometimes can resort to sexual activity that falls outside of God's intended context, which can create guilt and shame.

- ◎ **Laughing:** Researchers in recent years have been able to prove that laughter has an antidepressant affect. It is God's mood stabilizer. The Bible spoke of laughter being good medicine several thousand years ago (Prov. 17:22).

- ◎ **Worshipful Prayer:** There are a number of research studies that indicate prayer has a positive impact in the process of healing emotionally and physically. What is interesting is that some of the research had no religious foundation to it. In fact, the researchers had actually set out to disprove that prayer has a positive impact on healing. Their findings left some researchers puzzled as they actually discovered that prayer had an impact on hospital patients who didn't pray themselves and did not even realize that someone was praying for them.

- ◎ **Uplifting Music:** Daniel Amen, MD, in his book *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* wrote about his research utilizing the SPECT Scan on the human brain and found that music has a powerful impact. Some music can cause agitation and/or a depressed mood. However, uplifting music, including worship music, can have a profoundly positive impact on our brain chemistry.

- ◎ **A Nutritionally Healthy Diet, Adequate Sleep, and Physical Conditioning:** Some well-intentioned men and women in leadership positions in ministry and other caregiving vocations can make the error of minimizing the impact our physical health has on depression. The default setting can be that we assume that depression is purely spiritual or psychological. But remember that one form of depression is endogenous, meaning biological.

Expanded Information on Nutritional and Body Health

Research in the past several decades has linked a significant number of biomedical conditions to depression. For instance, low thyroid, testosterone, or vitamin D contributes significantly to depression. Diabetes, seizure conditions, and Parkinson's disease are also major contributors to depression. In fact, for some individuals, a depression is the first symptom of these serious medical conditions.

It might be good for us to expand on a few facts concerning nutrition as it pertains to brain balance and emotional health. We are fortunate to live at a time that nutrition supplements can contribute significantly to our quality of life, including emotional vitality. Unfortunately, most people overlook this entire aspect of personal vitality. But for those with some curiosity, here are a few tips on nutritional supplements as they relate to a more positive mental-emotional vitality.

Supplements, such as the herbal remedy St. John's Wort, vitamin D, testosterone, and the amino acid 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), can be very helpful in the treatment for mild and moderate depression.

St. John's Wort is the most studied herb of all time, with more than two dozen double-blind studies around the world. The active ingredient is *Hypericum Perforatum* (which means "above the ghost"). Hundreds of years ago, this flower was used to supposedly ward off an evil spirit. What it was actually doing was acting on the brain and the body to help digestion, act as an antiviral anti-inflammatory, and support thyroid function. Overall, it gave a person a sense of well-being without a drug high by gently balancing the neurotransmitter GABA, serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Individuals who suffer from a long-term chronic mild depression historically referred to as dysthymia can do quite well with this herb. It can help a person get up and get going, even if the general melancholy persists.

A person can take St. John's Wort in a capsule, tea, or liquid extract that can be found in many pharmacies or health shops. It is important to read the label and look for an active ingredient of 0.03 percent *Hypericum*. There are several cautions concerning St. John's Wort. It can affect the effectiveness of some prescribed meds and hormones such as birth control pills and immune suppressants. It is not recommended that you take it with antidepressants. Also, if a person is fair skinned and has light colored eyes, he or she may find that it makes him or her more sensitive to the sun and sunburn more easily.

Vitamin D is useful in the treatment of mild and moderate depression. Most people who live in areas of the world that have four seasons likely have low levels of vitamin D due to the lack of natural sunlight on the skin. This increases the potential for endogenous depression that some refer to as *winter blues* or *cabin fever*.

Very few foods naturally have vitamin D. Fortified foods provide most of the vitamin D in the diets of those who live in the developed world.

- Fatty fish, such as salmon and tuna, are among the very best.
- Mushrooms, beef liver, and egg yolks provide small amounts.
- Dairy products provide vitamin D. However, many of the benefits of dairy are negated by the use of hormones in milk production with dairy cows.
- Some brands of orange juice, soy beverages, and yogurt contain vitamin D, but you need to check the labels.
- The body makes vitamin D when skin is directly exposed to the sun. Sunshine indoors through a window does not produce vitamin D. Cloudy days, shade, and having dark skin also cut down on the amount of vitamin D the skin manufactures.
- Vitamin D dietary supplements are available in the form of D2 (ergocalciferol) and D3 (cholecalciferol). Both increase vitamin D in the blood that over time can reduce the intensity or duration of depression.

Testosterone supplementation can be very helpful for aging men if the male hormone levels are found to be low. This supplementation has to be done through a physician. Low testosterone is a major contributor to male depression, fatigue, and irritability.

5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) is an amino acid found in low amounts in foods like turkey and bananas. 5-HTP is the molecule the body uses to make serotonin, a molecule that helps elevate mood by giving the body more of the raw materials it needs to make more serotonin. You can't get 5-HTP from food. However, the amino acid tryptophan, which the body uses to manufacture 5-HTP, can be found in foods such as turkey, chicken, potatoes, sunflower seeds, pumpkin, collard greens, and especially in seaweed. 5-HTP is best used by a person who is experiencing both depression and anxiety. It is also effective in helping those who suffer from insomnia-based depression and anxiety.

Anti-inflammatory Foods and Supplements: In recent years, research has indicated that some depressions may be connected with inflammation of the brain. Our bodies, including our brain tissues, experience inflammation. For example, when we get a wood splinter in our skin, in just a few hours, it can become inflamed. Or we may get a blister on our foot from hiking, and it becomes a hot spot. This is the immune system's way of fighting off danger of a foreign object, bacteria, or virus in our system. But too much inflammation is not good.

There are indications that our brain can become inflamed as well. The main culprits of inflammation of the brain are in our diet: gluten, sugars, and yeasts. In fact, gluten is terrible for the brain, even if a person is not sensitive to gluten.

There are also anti-inflammatory foods such as fish, flax seed, garlic, and others. A web search will likely reveal foods you may enjoy that have an anti-inflammatory affect. Omega-3 fish oils are among the best. You can find them as a supplement to foods or consume it directly. There are some these days that do not have the fishy aftertaste.

Call, Mission, Vision, and Values

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: We can more effectively navigate life's challenges when we have a clear map to guide us. For your life journey, can you identify your call, mission, vision, and values? This is a very challenging exercise. Don't concern yourself with getting it exactly right the first time. Just get started. You can refine each area over time through discussion, prayer, and reflection.



CALL

"I, (your name), exist to honor God for the purpose of (fill in the blank with what you are about) . . ."

NOTE IT HERE:



MISSION

" . . . As evidenced by (what you do)."

NOTE IT HERE:



VISION

"What I see for my future is (your dream or aspiration)."

NOTE IT HERE:



VALUES “What am I truly about at my core of my being (**principles**)?”

NOTE IT HERE:

All Aboard the Principle Train

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: We can more effectively navigate life's challenges when we have a clear map to guide us. For your life journey, can you identify one life principle in each of the five areas using the sample to catalyze your heart and mind? Feel free to identify other categories as well. When we have guiding principles while choosing a good attitude, it is easier to choose the correct behavior and not allow our lives to be derailed by our emotions.

Why should we bother to clarify and prioritize our values (principles)?

- ⦿ We can make better decisions faster when we are clear on our values and principles.
- ⦿ Difficult decisions require less mental and emotional energy when our values are clear.
- ⦿ Those who navigate life with clear values and principles tend to experience a higher level of contentment and fulfillment. When we are not totally clear concerning our values, making the highest and best decisions quickly can be very difficult.
- ⦿ People who live by clear principles tend to experience a lower level of stress and frustration in complex and difficult situations.

SAMPLE

Guiding Principles for My Life

On Attitude

I will . . .

- ⦿ Choose to exercise my God-given spiritual freedom and prerogative to not take offense at the foolishness of others (Prov. 19:11).
- ⦿ Choose what kind of person I will be with the help of God's Spirit and not allow circumstances or others to write the script for my life. Life is 10 percent circumstances and 90 percent attitude (Eph. 1; 5:1).

On Behavior and Relating

I will...

- ⊙ Be kind to others because it is who I want to be, especially around those who need it but do not deserve it (Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 5:15–16).
- ⊙ Treat others as I wish to be treated (Luke 6:31).

On Priorities

I will...

- ⊙ Make prayer the first option, not an afterthought or an act of desperation (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:4–8).
- ⊙ Set my mind on things above and view life through an eternal lens (Col. 3:21).

On Stewardship

I will...

- ⊙ Remember and consider God's many blessings. All that is good in me and all that I think I possess actually belong to God and are on loan to me. This includes my assets, opportunities, relationships, possibilities, and capacities (1 Tim. 5:17).
- ⊙ Be generous. In doing so, I will be emulating my Father in Heaven, the Giver of all good things (1 Tim. 5:18; Acts 20:37).

On Valuing

I will...

- ⊙ Demonstrate regard for the value of others, because their value is derived from the sacrifice Christ made on their behalf (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:10).
- ⊙ Choose to bookend each day by letting my wife know that I love her, even if I am working outside the country. The day will eventually come when these words will be my final message to her this side of heaven (1 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 5:21).
- ⊙ "Value people—use things!"
- ⊙ Be genuinely invested in the vitality and success of others.
- ⊙ Be grateful and express it regularly. Gratitude is among the greatest of all the virtues and the parent of all other virtues.

Guiding Principles for My Life

On Attitude

I will...

On Behavior and Relating

I will...

On Priorities

I will...

On Stewardship

I will...

On Valuing

I will...

Developing a Strategic Plan for Vitality

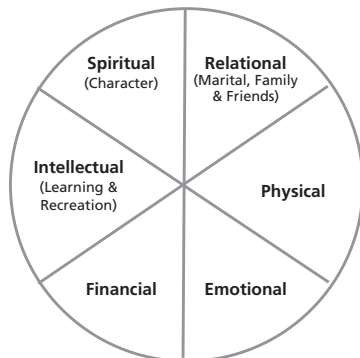
PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: In the same way that our bodies will have symptoms of a medical condition, there are *early warning signs* that our reservoir of vitality is declining. Sometimes those around us may be more aware of our signs than we are. Other indications can be conditions like headaches, fatigue, irritable mood, etc.

What might be some of the *early warning signs* that your vitality is declining?

What might be indicators that you have a tendency to ignore and just push through that can have significant consequences later?

What might come in from the sewer pipe (sin-filled world) at the base of your reservoir?

There are activities we involve ourselves in that give us a false sense of being filled up. But it actually falls short. It involves things like eating, TV watching, video games, spending—activities that give us a FALSE sense of being filled up. What might be some of your activities that fall short of bringing vitality?



The Spiritual Streams

VITALITY EXERCISE: This vitality wheel identifies all the streams that bring vitality. Can you identify several activities or rituals in each area that bring vitality? What are the activities that, when you complete them, you can find yourself thinking, “That was good—a true gift from God.”

- ⦿ What rejuvenates you mentally? _____
- ⦿ When did you last read a new book? _____
- ⦿ Do you have a hobby? _____
- ⦿ Are you learning something new? _____
- ⦿ What activities, practices, or people are especially renewing to you mentally (learning)?

- ⦿ What is it about the activities that can bring vitality to your life context?

Spiritual (Character) Renewal

Reflect on the following questions:

- ⦿ Is my “spiritual feeding” the right diet for me? How might it need to change?
- ⦿ Is my prayer life improving? How does it need to be changed?
- ⦿ Where have I seen God’s faithfulness in recent days?
- ⦿ What actions in my life would demonstrate a deeper trust in God?
- ⦿ When was the last time I spent more than three hours in solitude in order to listen to God?
- ⦿ Am I involved in relationships that reflect a healthy accountability?
- ⦿ Is my focus more on *doing* or *being*?
- ⦿ Do I have a “Mount of Olives,” a place of quiet reflection in my life?
- ⦿ Am I free of bitterness or resentment?
- ⦿ Where in my life might I lack a teachable spirit?

- ⦿ In what ways am I recognizing God’s work through the adversities of my life?
- ⦿ Do I recognize God’s grace and blessings in daily living?
- ⦿ Do I have an attitude of gratitude?

Your Physical Stream of Renewal

- ⦿ What activities bring renewal to you physically when your vitality is low?

- ⦿ What rituals or activities, when you have completed them, usually leave you feeling grateful that you did so? _____
- ⦿ What activities or practices are especially renewing to you physically?

- ⦿ What is it about these particular activities that have the capacity to bring you a fresh vitality?

Your Recreational Stream of Renewal

- ⦿ What brings renewal to you recreationally? _____
- ⦿ When did you last do something simply for the fun of it? _____
- ⦿ How do you de-stress? _____

One of my favorite questions to ask a client is, “What do you do to de-stress?” Quite often the response is, “Well, I use to [blank], but I haven’t done that for a long time.” Some people even feel guilty when they get involved in hobbies or recreational activities. They are often robbed of the joy of the activity by emotionally taking themselves out to the whipping post for wasting time. However, a balanced involvement in recreation actually contributes to our being a more effective worker, spouse, or parent.

- ⦿ What activities are especially renewing for you recreationally? _____
- ⦿ What is it about the activities that can bring vitality to your life context?

Your Emotional Stream of Renewal

- ⦿ What brings renewal to you emotionally? _____
- ⦿ What activities, when you finish them, make you say, “That was good—a true gift from God!”

- ⦿ What activities, practices, or people are especially renewing to you emotionally?

- ⦿ What is it about the activity or the friend that can bring a fresh vitality?

Flowing from your relational stream, what activities, practices, and people bring a renewed vitality?

ACTIVITY (What renews you)

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

RELATIONSHIP (Who renews you)

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

What activities or practices are especially renewing to you spiritually? In what ways do you need to be more intentional about your character and spiritual vitality?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

It might be helpful to use the following chart to assist in the processing of building a personal and professional strategic plan to gain and maintain vitality in order to be more effective for the long journey.

Vitality Strategies for Each Stream

What are the rituals and activities that bring vitality to your life? Write them down below and discuss them with a spouse or accountability relationship.

Mental (Learning):

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Recreational:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Emotional:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Physical:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Streams that Bring Connectedness in Life

Marital:

1. _____
2. _____

Family:

1. _____
2. _____

Relational (Personal Friendship):

1. _____
2. _____

Streams that Bring Substance to Life

Spiritual (How are you spiritually fed?):

1. _____
2. _____

Character (What character quality are you striving to cultivate?):

1. _____
2. _____

Balancing Principles of a Strategic Vitality Plan

PERSONAL INSIGHT EXERCISE: If Jesus, as the Son of God, needed to step back from his mission, and if we are to follow his example, for what purposes might we want to consider solitude in our own life?

Jesus' Reasons for the Practice of Solitude

If Jesus, as the Son of God, needed to step back from his mission and if we are to follow His example, for what purposes might we want to consider solitude in our own life?

TEXT	OCCASION	WHERE AND WHEN	REASON
Matt. 4:1-11	In preparation for the inauguration of ministry	40 days of fasting in the wilderness	Preparation for a new ministry effort
Matt. 14:13	Receiving the bad news of John the Baptist's execution	"... withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place."	After a season of painful loss (grieving)
Matt. 14:23	Feeding of the 5,000	"... went up on a mountainside by himself to pray."	After a major success in ministry
Matt. 17:1-9	God speaks through the transfiguration	Sought the silence of a lonely mountain	Heard from his Father without distraction
Matt. 26:36-40	Before a major challenge	Preparation in the garden for the cross	Find solitude in order to pray
Mark 1:35	Following and during an intense season of ministry activity	"...in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus... went off to a solitary place."	Gain perspective and talk with his Father to prepare for things to come

TEXT	OCCASION	WHERE AND WHEN	REASON
Mark 6:31	After an intense season of ministry	Returned from teaching & healing; “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place . . .”	As an example to the disciples to get involved in the practice of solitude.
Luke 5:16	After draining seasons of life, he withdrew to pray.	“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”	Rejuvenation and renewal
Luke 6:12	Before a major choice or decision	Spent the entire night on the mountainside praying.	Wisdom for choosing his disciples
John 8:1	To gain perspective in the midst of conflict	“Then they all went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.”	Gain perspective on a conflicted situation and to find clear direction.