



Holy God, Holy Things, Holy People: Pastoral Care in Proximity to God’s Holiness

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Doxology Collegium August 2014

Prologue: The Care of Souls

The art of pastoral care has entered a new millennium. At the turn of the 21st century much debate surrounded the changing role of a pastor. Uncertainty and confusion still remain today. Many notables have offered their account of pastoral ministry.¹ Nonetheless, it’s safe to say that in many contexts the role of pastor has morphed from the biblical and historic role of *seelsorger*—the German term for one who gives care of souls—to that of a CEO, administrator, leader, manager, coach, accountant, or therapist.² Sadly, sometimes it’s all of these smashed into one, where the pastor is irreparably reduced to “a quivering mass of availability” and often led to practice “promiscuous ministry.”³

Many correctives have been offered, calling for the renewal of classic pastoral ministry. Their aim has been to restore clergy to “physicians of the soul” engaged in the healing art—the diagnosis and treatment of the cure of souls (*cura animarum*).⁴

¹See works by Eugene Peterson and William Willimon. Historically and biblically, the role of a “minister of the Gospel is eminently a *Seelsorger*, a bishop (overseer), a pastor (shepherd), a watchman, a man who by God has been entrusted with the cure (*cura*) of souls, Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:20, 26, 27,31; Ezek. 3:13ff. Such, of course, he is also when in the pulpit, but in addition he is duty-bound to look after the spiritual welfare of each one of his members. Like Paul he is to teach *publicly* and from *house to house* . . . Acts 20:20.” Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, 172.

²Dean Wenthe, “More Than Leader, Administrator, and Therapist: The Scriptural Substance of the Pastoral Office.” In *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*. Edited by Wenthe et.al., (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 199-213.

³William Willimon writes: “My Colleague Stanley Hauerwas has accused the contemporary pastor of being little more than ‘a quivering mass of availability.’ Practicing what I have called ‘promiscuous ministry’—ministry with no internal, critical judgment about what care is worth giving—we become the victims of a culture of insatiable need. We live in a capitalist, consumptive culture where there is no purpose to our society other than ‘meeting our needs.’ The culture gives us the maximum amount of room and encouragement to ‘meet our needs’ without appearing to pass judgment on which needs are worth meeting.” *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. (Abingdon: Nashville, 2002), 60.

⁴Again, Peterson and Willimon have written extensively on this: “For many pastors, one of the greatest burdens of ministry is the continual, unrelenting exposure to the intensity of human pain through their counseling of troubled souls within the congregation. Yet this is historically one of the essential acts of Christian ministry. One of the most important ways that pastors differ from mental health professionals is that pastors have the freedom, indeed the obligation, to intervene in the lives of troubled souls within their congregations.” *Ibid*, 177.

As such, this paper will build upon the classic model of the ordinary and extraordinary pastoral care of souls and seek to offer a distinct contribution to the extraordinary care of souls by providing a specific framework, or better yet, a habitus of care situated in ritual proximity to the holiness of God.

Introduction: Holy God and unholy confusion

Central to the nature of God and each Person of the Trinity is holiness. Some brief Scripture passages easily bring this to our attention:

- *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:1-2)*
- *[Jesus prayed] "And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 17:11)*
- *And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." (Luke 4:33-34)*
- *Jesus said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26)... "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14).*

It would seem obvious, then, that holiness would also be central to the people of God and the life of His Church. However, there is no lack of confusion among God's people regarding the nature of holiness itself and how it actually pertains to the Christian life—pastors included.

"The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shop they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns – how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money... The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week in town and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them. In these communities of sinners, one of the sinners is called pastor and given a designated responsibility in the community. It is this responsibility that is being abandoned in spades." Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 2.

What does it actually mean to be holy? Does it refer to behavior, good deeds, and morality? Or, as the texts above imply, is it a state of being? Theologically, the holiness of God refers to the sacred—to things undefiled, pure, clean, and set apart by God as He Himself is pure, holy, and set apart. So why is there confusion?⁵

In large part, it's because we in the West live in a desacralized secular culture that has long lost the ability to distinguish between the sacred and the profane (common), the holy and the unclean. This is especially prevalent in the misbelief that dogma (doctrine) is merely an abstract spiritual concept that is really only good for cognitive engagement rather than part of the vivid spiritual reality that flows from the concrete reality rooted in the Person of the Holy Trinity and His relationship with His creation—especially fallen mankind—where dogma is vividly enacted and not merely studied. As such, the sacred and profane (common) become mere abstract categories of thought rather than actual real spiritual realities.

Making matters worse, the materialism, expressive individualism, and narcissism of our time have long been aiming to make everything holy and nothing profane, or if you prefer, nothing holy and everything profane. And when this is coupled with the rise of what Phillip Reif has called “psychological man,” where a person is stripped of all reference points outside of him or herself, including God; as well as what he has called the “triumph of the therapeutic,” where there is no evil, but only pain and all life is experienced through a psychological therapeutic lens, confusion was inevitable.⁶ When classic pastoral care is abandoned and replaced by a psychological view of God, the recognition of the full effects of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature become lost. Further misunderstandings over holiness are due to the unfortunate practice by many in the church to reduce holiness to morality and morality to legality. In short, we have become more concerned about the “moral infractions” of life than the “spiritual contamination” of it. In fact, a brief survey of contemporary Christian literature on holiness usually, if not exclusively, focuses on personal piety, godly behavior, self-control, good works, and ethics—in other words, entirely on the Law—rather than on the cleansing, purifying, and purging force of God's holiness over the devil, the world, and our sinful nature through the Gospel.⁷ It becomes problematic when the life, death,

⁵ For fine treatments on holiness see John W. Kleinig's works: “Worship and the Way of Holiness,” *Logia* 16/1 (2007: 5-8); “Sharing in God's Holiness” *Lutheran Theological Review* 8:1/2 (1995): 105-118; “Luther on the Christian's Participation in God's Holiness,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 19/1 (1985): 21-29; *Leviticus: Concordia Commentary*, Concordia: St. Louis, 2003. *Grace Upon Grace*, Concordia, St. Louis, 2008.

⁶ Phillip Reif, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*. (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1966).

⁷ For example, consider popular evangelical authors Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*. (Crossway: Wheaton, 2012), and John Eldridge's *The Utter Relief of Holiness: How God's Goodness Frees Us from Everything that Plagues Us*. (Faith Words: New York, 2013). The title is promising, but too often he tends to confuse holiness with works or self-control.

and resurrection of God's Holy Son, Jesus Christ, is seen primarily as an arrangement for sin management of one kind or another rather than the abundant life given in and through God's holy love.⁸ However, to be fair, not all such approaches are inherently unhelpful. Without question, a Christian virtue ethics can be salutary for the Church and her people, and does help guard against any tendency toward antinomianism.⁹ But reducing holiness to simple human behavior consisting of actions, inactions, and reactions to God and His Law seems significantly shortsighted, particularly in light of how Scripture speaks of God's holiness.

In the end, the loss of the holy not only impoverishes our theology, but it deprives and weakens pastoral care, diminishes piety, and ultimately thins faith. It's time to reclaim the sacred and unabashedly affirm that God is holy and gives Himself and His holiness through his Holy Son, Jesus Christ, whereby His Holy Spirit sets apart His Holy Christian Church and pastors to ensure this holiness gets delivered through holy things in order to make holy people.

This will be one of the ongoing themes in this paper and any further projects that develop from it. Even so, the specific emphasis of this paper will emphasize how classic pastoral care can employ the holy things of God to give extraordinary care to troubled souls and do so in a way that is ritually shaped by proximity to God's holiness.

Holy God, Holy Things, Holy People

Nowhere does Scripture give us a clear and explicitly succinct definition of what holiness in God means and yet, despite this, we're not really in any doubt. In the Psalms God is "the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18).¹⁰ In Ezekiel, he is the "Holy One in Israel" (Ezek. 39:7). In Hosea, God is "the Holy One in your Midst" (Hos. 11:9).

⁸ For critiques on the gospel of sin management see Dallas Willard's, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1998).

⁹ For an interesting read that prizes justification by faith while also seeing room for a Lutheran virtues ethic, see Joel D. Biermann's book, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. (Concordia: St. Louis, 2014). One word of caution, however, is that Biermann sees the contemporary Lutheran preaching scene devoid of clear practical exhortation for living the "Christian life" and so curiously aims to demonstrate the inadequacy and the "detrimental" nature of the Law/Gospel dialectic in favor of a 'three kinds of righteousness' paradigm for ethics and understanding the Christian life, which includes his understanding sanctification (see p.115-118). His concern stems from an alleged rise of antinomian Lutherans, but in my opinion he fails to adequately substantiate this claim. Likewise, his description of Christian virtue is devoid of reference to our Lutheran understanding of the baptismal life: the daily drowning of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man created in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ However, it must be noted that John Kleinig points out that the Old Testament tabernacle architecture was rather definitive about God's holiness: "It is much better to start with God's own definition of his holiness as was spelt out quite concretely by the architecture and arrangement of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament." "Sharing in God's Holiness" p. 3 online edition, accessed 6/25/14.

http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/9313/2695/2215/Sharing_in_Gods_Holiness.pdf

Habakkuk addresses Him as “my Holy One” (Hab. 1:12). Without question, they all knew what this meant. In fact, in his most recent work, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World*, David Wells offers a profound insight:

This name, ‘the Holy One of Israel,’ stands out, not only because it appears so often but also because it is so central. God, it is true, is known as the Mighty One of Israel. But there are no references to him as the Merciful One of Israel, the Just One of Israel, or the Patient One of Israel, true as all of these are. God is abounding in mercy, always just, and amazingly patient. But his holiness includes all of these other perfections and much more. It is a fundamental statement of who God is and what he is like. Holiness in God is everything that sets him apart from the sinful creation, and everything that elevates him above it in moral splendor.¹¹

Therefore recognizing that God is holy is essential to all theology and consequently all pastoral care. But recognizing what His holiness consists of and how to access it and apply it is indispensable to the care of souls. It was the same for the Old Testament Israelite priests who gave care to God’s people. While surrounded by pagan people who worshipped pagan gods, the Israelites remained unambiguous about God and His holiness. They readily recognized that the Lord alone was inherently and permanently holy. They understood His holiness was the essence of His being. It was inseparable from Him and His presence. Moses experienced this first hand, and no more clearly for us than when God first appeared to him in the burning bush:

¹Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” ⁴When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:1-5)

Moses would experience the holiness of God multiple times. In this case, the things that came into contact with God’s presence (i.e. the bush and the ground) were made holy. His presence was manifested in a holy fire that had the capacity to purify and cleanse that which it touched, or utterly consume and obliterate anything that touched it. To

¹¹ *God in the Whirlwind*, (Crossway, Wheaton: IL, 2014), 103.

help us understand how the same holiness can either cleanse or annihilate, consider what Andrew Murray writes about the burning bush narrative:

The nature of fire may be either beneficent or destructive. The sun, the great central fire, may give life and fruitfulness, or may scorch to death. All depends upon occupying the right position, upon the relation in which we stand to it. And so everywhere, when God the Holy One reveals Himself, we shall find the two sides together: God's Holiness as judgment against sin, destroying the sinner who remains in it, and as Mercy freeing His people from it... Of the elements of nature there is none of such spiritual and mighty energy as Fire: what it consumes it takes and changes into its own spiritual nature, rejecting as smoke and ashes what cannot be assimilated. And so the Holiness of God is that infinite Perfection by which He keeps Himself free from all that is not Divine, and yet has fellowship with the creature, and takes it up into union with Himself, destroying and casting out all that will not yield itself to Him.¹²

The ground became set apart from what was common. In other words, it had been consecrated. It was now sacred. God's holiness made it so. Moses was therefore standing on holy ground. It would either purify him or obliterate him. Though Moses himself was to be consecrated by the Lord, anything unclean on him would desecrate God's holiness. Since God Himself can never be made unclean, His holiness simply consumes all things that would otherwise desecrate what is holy. Sandals were considered unclean. Thus Moses had to remove his sandals lest they desecrate God's holiness and be destroyed, along with Moses himself.

What becomes so important for contemporary pastors to observe, both here and later in the Levitical priesthood, is the pattern of how God imparts His holiness.¹³ In short, as John Kleinig notes, all holiness is derived from God and "is available only by way of contact with him, like electricity from a battery."¹⁴ Thus the pattern was that people and things borrowed their holiness from their association and contact with God. This is

¹² Kleinig, "Sharing in God's Holiness" p. 6 online edition, accessed 6/25/14.

http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/9313/2695/2215/Sharing_in_Gods_Holiness.pdf

¹³ Also important to note is that the "Old Testament distinguishes between the most holy things that sanctify, and what is holy from contact with them. So, for example, the anointing oil, the meat from the sin offerings, and the bread from the grain offerings were most holy, whereas the priests who were consecrated by them were only holy in a secondary sense. The priest could not by himself sanctify anybody or anything. Rather, he administered the most holy things that God used to sanctify his people." Kleinig, "Luther on the Christian's Participation in God's Holiness" online edition, p.4, accessed 6-20-14.

http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/6113/3299/3619/Luther_On_Holiness.pdf

¹⁴ Kleinig, "Sharing in God's Holiness," online edition, p.2-3, accessed 6-20-14.

http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/9313/2695/2215/Sharing_in_Gods_Holiness.pdf

especially spelled out and ritually formalized for the Israelites through the Levitical priesthood, along with the sacred things—space and vessels—and the purification rites established by God for the overall spiritual benefits of His people.

Important to recognize is that this would very likely also include the byproducts of what our current therapeutic culture desires, namely, emotional and mental peace for the individual to whom the holiness was being applied. Or perhaps said more broadly, it provided a clear conscience.¹⁵ As such, the peoples' holiness was "an acquired condition, an extrinsic power, which could and would be lost the moment contact with [God] was lost."¹⁶ Thus, their worldview was such that it ritually centered on God's holiness and the overall life giving benefits received from His holiness in light of their sin, defilement, and spiritual contamination.

In short, Kleinig notes that, "the effect of God's holiness is like fire with some kinds of metal. On the one hand, like fire with dross it burns out and purifies that which is contaminated by impurity. On the other hand, like fire it communicates itself and permeates that which is clean. It is both life-giving and death-dealing, creative and destructive, saving and judging. It is therefore either beneficial or detrimental in its effect on human beings."¹⁷ The Israelite way of faith and life centered on God's holiness and receiving that holiness. Their priestly care of souls was done precisely through the delivery of God's holiness to His people.

In this regard, the task of the modern day pastor is not at all different. The holiness of God still remains central. But now Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, has fulfilled all righteousness and atoned for the sin of the world. Paul makes the source of life unequivocally clear: "*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Thus, Christ has sent His Holy Spirit to call people by the Gospel, to cleanse and to sanctify those who are baptized into the holy Triune name of God.

And where the priests interceded on behalf of God's people, pastors are today ordained and set apart to lead the Divine Service and to administer Holy Communion to souls contaminated and defiled by the devil, the world, and their own sinful nature. Pastors are set apart so that God's people might receive the benefits and life that emanate from the holiness of Christ's Word and His precious body and blood. Yes, the holiness of Christ's very body and blood is even put into the mouths of perpetrators and violators

¹⁵ For much more on living with a clear conscience see *Grace upon Grace* by John Kleinig, p.49-54.

¹⁶ Kleinig, "Sharing in God's Holiness," online edition, p.2-3, accessed 6-20-14.

http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/9313/2695/2215/Sharing_in_Gods_Holiness.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid. p.5

of God's Law so that it may purge away sin and cleanse burdened consciences. Again, Kleinig summarizes how God's holiness is present in the Divine Service and how we share in it.

"God's holiness is communicated by his presence, and that presence is given in the divine service. This means that...holiness is not a moral concept, but a liturgical reality, for true holiness comes from the true worship of the Triune God. Thus an object is holy if it is 'separated from profane use and consecrated for sacred and divine service.' Christians are holy, because they are separated from ordinary life and hallowed for a life of worship through their faith in Jesus. He is our Holy One, since he alone makes us holy. He therefore is our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). We are holy only in him. Through faith in him we belong to God and share in his holiness."¹⁸

Important to note, then, is that our holiness is not rooted in our godly behavior, good deeds, or moral routines, but in the delivery of God's holiness to us.¹⁹ Regular proximity to God's holiness is required to maintain holiness. From it emanates every color of His purity and perfection, which will in turn bring with it the fruit of faith, including repentance, love for God's Law, and the freedom to behave, act, and live as the holy ones of God.²⁰ Thus, the further one is removed from the Divine Service, the further one

¹⁸ Kleinig, "Luther on the Christian's Participation in God's Holiness" online edition, p.2, accessed 6-20-14. http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/6113/3299/3619/Luther_On_Holiness.pdf

¹⁹ Andrew Murray put it succinctly: "Holiness is not something we do or attain; it is the communication of Divine Life, the inbreathing of the Divine Nature, the power of the Divine Presence resting upon us. And our power to become holy is found in the call of God: the Holy One calls us to Himself that He may make us holy in possessing Himself." Cited by Kleinig, "Sharing in God's Holiness," online edition, p.7, accessed 7-29-14. http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/9313/2695/2215/Sharing_in_Gods_Holiness.pdf

²⁰ This needs to be unpacked in much greater detail, particularly the subtle but significant differences between God's purity and His holiness. In short, the above noted behaviors are part of what it means to participate in God's holiness. As Kleinig notes, "Holiness is not achieved by human performance. But this does not mean that God's holiness does not require human obedience." "Sharing in God's Holiness," online edition, p.9, accessed 7-29-14. http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/9313/2695/2215/Sharing_in_Gods_Holiness.pdf However, being "purified" by God is first required before participation in His holiness can occur. Again Kleinig helps clarify this distinction, particularly as it was understood in the Old Testament. "The state of holiness was an environment created by God's presence in the tabernacle or the temple. It was, as it were, a divine bridgehead in the profane world, the place where heaven and earth overlapped. Its opposite pole was the state of impurity which was utterly incompatible with holiness, like light with darkness. In fact, holiness annihilated impurity, like fire which burns up petrol. Everything natural and normal therefore had to be cleansed of impurity, before it could come into contact with God and so share in his holiness, just as water must be clean, before the light of the sun can shine into it." Ibid, p.4. Thus, when purification has occurred, participation in God's holiness follows. Sanctification sets in. One is now set apart, consecrated for holy living. Like dirty water that's purified and lets the sun shine into it and pervade it, a person is purified from sin and prepared to participate in God's holiness. By faith a purified person lets the light of Christ shine through their life as they walk in God's holiness. The deeds they do in faith are the deeds that Christ Jesus works through them; the love that they give to others is the love with which He first loved them; and the life they live in the body is the life they live by faith in him.

is removed from God's holiness and His sanctifying gifts of grace. From a pastoral perspective, this describes the inter-relationship between ordinary and extraordinary care of souls.

In the case of the extraordinary care of souls, the proximity to God's holiness must necessarily increase. However, it seems that this kind of care has not maintained this proximal pattern. Though shadows of it remain here and there, the extraordinary care of souls (and even the ordinary care of souls), has taken a different direction. It's very often a therapeutic and self-help trajectory, coupled with a corresponding interpersonal and hands off approach, where more leadership and care of the congregational organization is provided, while the actual care of individual souls is relegated to others. Unfortunately, this approach has negatively influenced many well-meaning pastors to practice "promiscuous ministry." More will be said on this below. But for the moment, it's important for pastors to note the proximal pattern of holiness that has long been used for the spiritual care of souls. It's also important to note how its use for extraordinary care of souls has nearly ceased. Understanding how this has occurred is crucial for pastors wanting to reclaim this pattern of extraordinary care.

Excursus

With all this said, a brief word on sanctification is warranted. Numerous debates surge around the notion of what's termed progressive sanctification. How we understand God's holiness will have a direct correlation to the notion of progressive sanctification. To be clear, progressive sanctification is the idea that as one grows in the faith one "must" also grow or progress in sanctification and therefore progress in the number of good works they do. Of course, the fruit of repentance and the fruit of the Spirit will be present in a believer. However, a host of challenges need to be addressed whenever one wants to quantify sanctification. Trying to run numbers on the Lord's work is a suspicious business.

First, who gets to measure the amount of sanctification? Then, who gets to say when enough is enough? You, me, your enemy, or Jesus? And how much counts as progression? If you reach a certain point, isn't there always room to progress just one more notch or room to do one more good deed? Will enough ever be enough? What is more, if just a general "increase" of good works is all that's required, to what or whom is that increase in relation why? You, me, Mother Theresa, or Jesus? Do you see the point?²¹

²¹ Harold Senkbeil writes distinctly if not definitively on this: "Justification (God's action to save us) and sanctification (our life of service to him) are to be clearly separated temporally and theologically, but not essentially. Like the proverbial horse and cart, they can neither be unhitched nor rehitched. Putting sanctification before

Word choice (tense, aspect, and mood) is essential for a more helpful understanding of sanctification. To say one “will grow” in faith and works (a descriptive approach) is helpful because it describes (by way of the Gospel) the fruit of the Spirit in the Christian life. However, to say one “must grow” (a prescriptive approach) is dangerous because it places the believer once again in bondage to the Law. To clarify the presence and purpose of the Law in the life of the believer one could say that the Law, 1) *describes*—it shows what God in Christ accomplishes in the life of the forgiven sinner by His Spirit; 2) the Law *proscribes*—it forbids things that are contrary to God’s will and dangerous to human life; and 3) the Law *prescribes*—it teaches what is pleasing to God by way of a life linked to Jesus by Baptism into Him.²² However, the Law itself cannot achieve, deliver, or impart sanctification. Therefore one cannot in any way progress in sanctification let alone accomplish sanctification by way of the Law.

As such, progressive sanctification is a dubious business. It’s also a concept that does no favors for the troubled soul. If one is to truly progress in their sanctification, what are we to say to those who remain afflicted with a burdened conscience, suffer from a chronically oppressed soul, or continually give in to a sin of weakness? Might it just be that God’s holiness comes to obliterate and scorch every thought and doubt that would cause us to question how far we must progress? Could it be that Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, who completely obeyed the Father who demands perfection, became our perfection for us? Might it be that He accomplished all that needs to be done when He declared, “It is finished?” Is it possible that the Holy Spirit makes you and me completely holy and thoroughly sanctified through the water and the Word of Baptism? The only way for us to grow in internal sanctification is for us to grow up externally into Christ, our true righteousness and holiness, “from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16). The debate, it appears, will rage on, but God’s holiness seems to be a sufficient remedy, not only for troubled souls, but also for the idea of progressive sanctification.

justification is an affront to God’s grace and a stumbling block to faith. Holding to justification without sanctification leads to nowhere, for “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). No one setting out on a journey in a horse-drawn cart hitches the cart in front of the horse, nor does he shoot the horse. Together they make a unit. Yet clearly the horse has to come first and provide the power if there is to be any movement... Thus when speaking about the power for the sanctified life, we dare never stop speaking about Christ. St. Paul put it this way: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). The person and work of the crucified Lord is the sum total of our message. He is all in all—“our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). No wonder, then, that Luther could write, “Having been justified by grace, we then do good works, yes, Christ himself does all in us.” *Sanctification: Christ in Action*. (Northwestern: Milwaukee, 1989), 120-121.

²² These three categories and descriptions of the law are original to and borrowed from Harold Senkbeil.

Simply put, if any progression is to be made, it's a progression that always moves toward the holiness of God. And rather than being linear or progressive in nature, this movement is actually more rightly understood to be cyclical. Daily sanctification includes daily repentance (contrition and faith) by which sin and shame are removed and we are given to share in Christ's holiness as well as His righteousness. Therefore, the closer we keep to His holiness, and the more regularly we return to it, the more regularly we are sanctified. Progressive sanctification understood this way is simply the believer living in close proximity to God's holiness through Jesus Christ, where He is at work in us rather than having a subjectively determined increase of good works or some kind of quantifiable moral achievement of our own. More could be said, and perhaps needs to be said. But that remains for another time.

Troubled Souls

Now we press on to the matter of extraordinary care for troubled souls. Old Testament Israel once again gives us a beginning point. Though the Israelites certainly had their own problems with idolatry, their culture and spiritual mindset was decidedly theocentric and biblically oriented. However, for Westerners of today this is simply not the case. The pervading materialism, expressive individualism, and narcissism of our greater culture, when coupled with the triumph of the therapeutic, have devastatingly influenced the mindset of our church culture. This includes the presence of biblically foreign manners of worship, emotionally driven spirituality, and pastoral care that all too often reflects the culture more than it does the holiness of God.

This is perhaps most notably seen in the spirituality of Christians today. The Israelites (and even Luther and his contemporaries for that matter) had a spirituality that began by seeing sin and spiritual defilement "in relation to God." That is, they began by seeing themselves primarily as perpetrators or violators of God's holiness and Law, and therefore in need of holy cleansing and healing. To be sure, victims of defilement also found consolation in God's holiness as its renewing power is all inclusive. Nonetheless, seeing themselves as primarily the victims of sin was not their default mode of spirituality.

By contrast, the contemporary spirituality of today's "psychological man" begins by seeing "sin in relation to me" rather than "sin in relation to God." This is the "me" generation after all. In fact, much of our own spirituality reflects the narcissism of today. This point of view begins by seeing ourselves primarily as the victims of sin. In fact, rather than actually beginning with sin, we often begin with things like anxiety, pain, and the disillusionment of the world in all of its disorder. Thus, whether we realize it or not, most modern day Christians begin by seeing ourselves principally as

the victims of pain and hurt, rather than as a perpetrator or violator of God's holiness or laws. To be sure, modern day Christians do see God as one who can offer therapeutic relief from their unrest, where they may even be willing to consider their actual "sin in relation to God" once their therapeutic need has been met. But as Christian Smith has demonstrated, the rise of "therapeutic, moralistic, deism" continues to defile the Christian culture.²³

This summarizes the spirituality for many in the West. Consequently, the devil, evil, and our sinful nature are not the default way of processing spirituality for many. It's not that people can't process things that way. It's that they have not been ritually and routinely compelled to do so by the church, so they've fallen into the comforts and confines of "psychological man." Purification and cleansing by God's holiness is therefore not a priority in the lives of many Christians. Rather therapeutic healing and emotional relief has become their priority.

Most Christians today would probably be surprised at how deeply they've actually embraced this kind of spirituality. Nonetheless, ill-founded as this may be, pastors need to recognize this understanding of spirituality if they hope to give proper care to troubled souls.

Adequate diagnosis of the presenting symptoms, the development of a curative treatment plan rooted in God's holiness, and its overall application to the underlying malady of a troubled soul, is crucial for extraordinary pastoral care today.²⁴ Without this awareness, and absent this approach, contemporary seelorsgers will find themselves easily lost in the emotionally ravaged spirituality of our culture and helplessly engulfed by the sea of a troubled soul's condition. Pastors mean well, but we end up paddling against the wind, all alone, with the wrong end of the oar.

In the past, I found myself lost and floating adrift the oceans of troubled souls far too many times. The result was to put unbearable pressure upon myself to find the solution to their problem, discover the perfect therapeutic relief, say the magic biblical word, and personally remove all the angst from their troubled souls. In medical terms, it would be like a doctor trying to diagnose heart disease by only using a stethoscope and then trying to cure it with just some Tylenol and daily home visits to listen to the heart.

²³ Christian Smith. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Presently there is an entire organization and outstanding program dedicated to doing the very thing this paper espouses. DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel. <http://www.doxology.us/> The people of DOXOLOGY are infatuated with the care of souls and desire to make pastors become better pastors in the classical care of souls—their own included.

It was a pastoral practice that nearly drove me into the ground. I teetered on the edge of despair. My idolatrous pressures and unrealistic expectations contaminated not only my own soul, but my ministry as well. It was when I returned to God's holiness that I began finding healing and cleansing for myself, as well as direction for the extraordinary care of souls.

Proximity to God's Holiness: Treating Troubled Souls

King David knew something about having a troubled soul. His expressions of "sin in relation to God" have been etched into God's Holy Word. In Psalm 51 David declares his guilt and cries out for God's Holy Spirit (v.11) to restore his troubled soul. However David also gives countless laments that express the heartache of "sin in relation to me," which in some ways encompass the cries of today for therapeutic relief. In these, too, David knows God's holiness, and he knows all the benefits that come with this holiness. He beautifully confesses it in Psalm 103:

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. ⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Psalm 103:1-8 ^{ESV})

To understand God's holiness is to know the fullness of all the benefits that come with it. The joy of using God's holiness is that it's the light that no darkness can overcome. It shines on the darkness of a troubled soul, be it guilt, shame, brokenness, heartache, headache, defiance, or depression. For pastors this becomes especially significant as we care for burdened consciences and hurting souls. However, the art of pastoral care is more than generically applying God's holiness to the troubled soul. True, God's holiness is such that it can purify and purge at will, but souls are delicate vessels and sometimes pastors need to help them learn to take their sandals off, lest the holy ground consume them.

Thus, like light that splits into a rainbow, the art of pastoral care is to know how to direct the light of God's holiness in the color that is specific to the malady of a particular soul, while also being mindful of their perceived need, and yet consistent with their actual need in Christ. This means being able to attend to the soul's affliction in a way that identifies their starting point. In particular, does it begin with "sin in relation to me" or "sin in relation to God?" (Here "sin" includes the offenses they commit, those

committed against them, and those pressing upon them from the fallen and disordered world.) Identifying their spiritual disposition allows pastors to help souls take off their sandals when necessary. And the art is to simultaneously retain close proximity to God's holiness so that spiritual cleansing, purging, and healing can ritually and regularly take place. No small task! As Chrysostom says, "The Shepherd needs great wisdom and a thousand eyes, to examine the soul's condition from every angle."²⁵

Thankfully, Psalm 103 (and others like it) confesses the depth of God's holiness. It not only clarifies the content of God's holiness, it delivers that holiness through God's audible and written Word. It is the living voice of the Gospel. From God's "holy name" come all of his benefits. And as the Psalm progresses, His benefits include forgiveness, healing, redemption, love, mercy, satisfaction, righteousness, and justice—a colorful rainbow indeed!

What ails the soul will certainly find remedy in God's holiness. The pastoral art of extraordinary care is to bring that holiness to people in such a way that it engages the soul by an array of senses—cognitive, emotional, verbal, spiritual, and ritual (i.e. the sense of time and frequency, routinely and regularly)—where it is formally and intimately experienced amid their extraordinary circumstances.

Of course, it's important for this extraordinary care to dovetail with the ordinary care being received through the Word and Sacrament of the Divine Service. Extraordinary circumstances require intensified and deliberate proximity to God's holiness; it flows from and leads to the holy things that God Himself provides in the Divine Service. Whenever contact with God's holiness is lost, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh waste little time in defiling God's people.

For example, consider the case of a troubled soul who wrestles with chronic doubt and anxiety (and also has a spiritual disposition that begins with "sin in relation to God"). Or ponder the soul who repeatedly struggles with pornography (and has a spiritual disposition that begins with "sin in relation to me"). In both cases there is contamination that spreads, not only to their own faith, but to other people as well. It must be contained and purified before it becomes terminally toxic. Here proximity to God's holiness is essential. This means extraordinary pastoral care will again and again return the troubled soul to God's holiness outside of the ordinary means of the Divine Service. Even so, it will be done in a like pattern to the Divine Service.

²⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1964), p. 56

Here too, Psalm 103 is instructive. In the case of the soul afflicted by chronic doubt and anxiety, the Psalm directs the hearer to the “holy name” of God “*who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s*” (v.5). More than a mere platitude to be heard, it calls the hearer to receive by faith the “good” that “satisfies” the soul, and to do so by maintaining a close proximity to God’s holy name. How that looks and sounds will be specific to the malady and disposition of each individual, but some general considerations are helpful to explore.

Doubt and anxiety in proximity to God’s holiness

Often those who wrestle with anxiety and doubt desire contentment. They may also have specific misbeliefs about God or themselves, which contaminate their security in life and their confidence in the Lord. They long for the safety of belovedness—the experience of knowing one is loved and protected—particularly by God and the sheltering received by His presence.²⁶ More times than not, such afflicted souls try to find contentment by looking inward. But faith teaches us to look outward to the Gospel. God’s holy name tells pastors exactly where to direct these troubled souls—to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a Trinitarian wellspring of God’s holiness.

Troubled souls are brought to “God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth” where pastors point them to the truth they confess about Him: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.”²⁷ Elsewhere, the Psalmist proclaims, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps 121:2). There is contentment to experience in the holy care of the Creator. Troubled souls are the objects of God’s affection. Pastorally drawing them into that holy affection is key. The Lord’s Prayer shows us one way. It invites burdened souls to come to the Heavenly Father as dear children come to their dear father. The belovedness they seek is exactly what He bestows.

To be sure, pastors have been authorized—set apart and consecrated—to enact God’s belovedness upon weary and worn souls. Through their ordained presence, in the name and in the stead of Christ, pastors engage in spiritual surgery using the scalpel of God’s holiness. They cauterize the bleeding of misbelief; disinfect doubt toward God; and apply the salve of “steadfast love” (Psalm 103:4).

²⁶ Popular pastor and author Tullian Tchividjian makes this observation about the distinction between God’s Law and love in Christ: “...the command to love is the Law, but the experience of belovedness is the Gospel.” *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World*. (David C. Cook: Colorado, 2013), 154.

²⁷ Luther’s Small Catechism, First Article and explanation.

Likewise, extraordinary care brings the Son, Jesus Christ—the Holy One of God—to the discontented soul. Chronic anxiety and routine doubt need close proximity to the Holy One of God. Troubled souls are called to cast their cares upon him. Doubt is acknowledged and worry is poured out to Christ’s crucified arms and listening ears. As the beloved hymn goes, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear; what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.” Jesus takes sorrow and sin upon Himself, nails it to the cross of Calvary, and then buries it with Him in the tomb. He is the true Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world—not merely sin in relation to God, but sin in relation to self. Thus all sin is put into remission, guilt is absolved, and hurts find healing in Him.

Again, this is not simple platitudes or mere therapeutic warm fuzzies, but pastoral care that calls faith into action, clinging to Christ through His Word amid the difficult circumstances of life. Where the therapeutic goal is relief of life’s pain, the extraordinary care of souls realizes that pain may actually be God’s holiness at work, purifying and cleansing the troubled soul, uncomfortable as it may be.

Yes, constant anxiety and chronic doubt can contaminate the soul utterly and devastatingly. Therefore cleansing is needed. Restoration is required. Proximity to the Holy One of God brings a powerful remedy. His love is unconditional. His compassion is irreversible. The Word of Christ’s love spoken into earholes is soothing for the soul. The regular care of souls includes preaching this truth in the Divine Service. This, too, is an art form of the highest degree. Homiletically speaking, I call the communication of this truth “evocative transference.” It flows out of the narrative of Scripture and is where the preacher taps into the emotional state of the soul by way of the emotion and vividness present in text of Scripture. It unsheathes another dimension of the text that allows for it to be received beyond the cognitive, at the sensory level. In other words, in extraordinary care the seelsorger seeks to peel back the fragile layers of a troubled or wounded soul to lovingly and delicately apply the holiness of God upon the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of that soul.

It’s a high art—a habitus—that aims to bring truth to the mind, refining to the conscience, and contentment to the soul by way of pastoral conversations. Such seasoned conversations are where the Holy Spirit is at work as the Word of God is enacted and the holiness of God is delivered. Very often ritualized actions from the Divine Service can accompany the Word in these conversations. The sign of the cross, the lighting of a candle or incense, kneeling on a kneeler at the altar rail, or the pastor placing his hand of blessing upon the head of the troubled soul; they are all ritual actions that engage yet another layer and dimension of the soul—the physical senses. Thus, flexibility and adaptability are helpful pastoral demeanors for these caring

conversations so that a pastor can be more alert to the unique circumstances of the soul, and then intentionally use ritualized actions that may be appropriate or helpful. The point being, these actions point to the concrete reality of faith, that this isn't a mere mental abstraction taking place, but the delivery of God's blazing, multi-colored holiness right here and now to this very flesh and blood person. It recalls how this troubled soul was first concretely baptized into the holy name of God with the tangible water and the sacramental Word. In this way, troubled souls are concretely and spiritually returned again and again to the font of faith that sanctifies by the Word of truth (John 17:17) as the holy name of God enacts the Trinitarian mysteries of God's holiness, all to satisfy *"you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."*

Pornography in proximity to God's holiness: Moral infractions vs. spiritual contamination

In a like manner, the extraordinary care of a soul struggling with pornography follows a similar pattern. Again, the intent would be to maintain close proximity to God's holiness. In this case, the affliction stems from direct disobedience of God's Law, which can be described as a moral infraction. But it also involves a defilement of self and others, particularly if there is a spouse involved. Thus, there is also a sinister spiritual contamination occurring. It ritually acts upon lust, coveting, and sexual fantasy, corrupting the soul by ritually giving entry to the work of the devil and his demons. Like vultures circling above a rotting carcass, the devil and his demons flock to things unclean.²⁸ Thus, there is far more than moral infractions occurring. The menacing force of Satan is not to be taken lightly. As Luther's hymn puts it, *"The old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe. With craft and dreadful might he arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal."*²⁹

The contamination and defilement incurred by this troubled soul differs significantly in content from the previously considered malady, but it remains distinctly severe. The remedy, however, remains the same. The pastoral art is to bring the heat and light of God's holiness to bear upon this soul with its specific malady. Once again, the goal is to carefully peel away the delicate layers of the soul—the emotional, the mental, the spiritual—to skillfully apply the holiness of God. And here again, Psalm 103 provides the rainbow of God's holiness, inviting pastors to expertly direct the appropriate beams of light onto this troubled soul. As we've already seen, the holy Trinity is the one *"³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit, who*

²⁸ Credit goes to John Kleinig for this analogy.

²⁹ *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, Lutheran Service Book 657.

crowns you with steadfast love and mercy...”—a multitude of laser-like beams to cauterize, cut, and cleanse a contaminated soul.

However, in this case, there’s an additional detail that requires attention. The spiritual disposition of this individual is one that starts with “sin in relation to me.” As such, care is required to help them take off their sandals in order to recognize holy ground. This may require some gentle cognitive reframing, emotional unveiling, imaginative engaging, and spiritual sustaining in order to properly orient their spiritual disposition upon the objective truth of God’s Word. But the goal is to make them ready to receive the sanctifying effects of God’s holiness without first being consumed by it. Thus, if they fail to recognize they’re on holy ground (i.e. a failure to recognize repentance is needed) then God’s holiness may destroy them by way of giving them over to the impurities of their heart.

As it is, pornographic indulgence (and its often resulting addiction) has commonalities with the therapeutic age. In fact, pornography addiction is an indulgent manifestation of our narcissistic therapeutic age.³⁰ People are deeply preoccupied with their own selves, and not much else. Gratification, indulgence, pleasure, and entitlement add layers of contamination that pastors will need to pull back and treat. We live in a self-consumed age. Here David Wells offers some profound insights about the malady of “psychological man” as well as the cure for it.

[People] are attuned to their own internal aches, pains, and confusions, and for them, the world ‘out there’ is over shadowed by the world ‘within.’ Their wounds become the prism through which they see all of reality. It is through this prism that they see God. And the value that God has for them is simply his value in resolving these internal pains and wounds... The truth, though, is that behind our pain, behind our many troubles, there is radical evil even if there are many who are blind to it. And when we line evil up against the expressed will of God, we get something even more serious than evil. We get *sin*. Without an understanding of sin, life is simply beyond explanation. We are left simply with therapies to help soften blows while what we really need is redemption.³¹

³⁰ Harold Senkbeil has observed that frequently porn obsession is 1) a learned self-treatment of acedia (spiritual apathy and slothfulness) and is the only way to “jolt” oneself out of numbness; or 2) self-treatment of emotional pain—like alcoholism, or drug abuse—where it is entered into not so much to feel good as to feel nothing and escape from unrelenting pain. From a collegial conversation.

³¹ Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, p.110-111. However, one limitation of Well’s otherwise engaging treatment is that he appears to limit evil to morality, without giving adequate consideration to the spiritual contamination of the soul

Helping people remove their sandals means we help them understand the full effects of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. In other words, there's more to sin than mere moral infractions, there's also devastating spiritual contamination. Like being exposed to nuclear radiation that destroys your body from the inside out and contaminates everyone you come into contact with, sin eats away at you from the inside out and can contaminate those who come into contact with you. Pornographic indulgence is that way. My own ministry has seen its effects. Spouses devastated, marriages destroyed, women objectified, children betrayed, daughters hurt, and careers lost. So it's more than just a bad deed. Helping people see the extent of spiritual contamination is essential. It's the equivalent of helping them remove their sandals before standing on holy ground.

In this case, when the sandals have been removed, the holy ground of Psalm 103 brings troubled souls into the depths of God's holy name—forgiveness, mercy, love, healing, and redemption! The extraordinary care of pastors will keep a troubled soul like this one in close proximity to God's holiness. The individual certainly needs the regular care of the Divine Service, where the body and blood of Christ is ritually and concretely poured into the mouth, bringing the purging fire of God's holiness to bear upon the contaminated soul. But extraordinary care requires increasing proximity to God's holiness to battle the residual effects of this sin with exhortation to regular, penitential reception of Christ's cleansing blood and sacred body in the Divine Service. Therefore specific and frequent meetings of pastoral conversation to enact the holiness of God's Word and exercise the holiness of baptismal faith described in Mark 16 and Romans 6 is crucial for extraordinary pastoral care. Luther's Small Catechism offers a profound guide to pastors and people alike:

"Second. What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare... Fourth. What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam is us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Once again, where the psychological view may simply want to remove pain, the spiritual view recognizes that sin must be drowned and die. Death is never easy. Just

i.e. "And what is often missed is that evil can be defined only in a *moral* existence, not in one that is simply therapeutic or psychological. There is no evil in a therapeutic world. There is only pain." p.110.

ask Jesus. But His death is what believers are baptized into so that His resurrection can also have its way with us both spiritually and physically. Within it, contamination is disinfected, defilement is purified, sins are forgiven, guilt is removed, and shame is cleansed. As often as someone returns to their sin and defilement, they need to return to the holiness of God for purification and forgiveness. Here they will learn to live an entirely new and different life, no longer slaves to their own obsessions that leave them with more shame, disgust, and self-loathing, but free to live Christ's own life in their bodies as He lives in them and they in Him.

Baptized into Christ, we have put on Christ and His holiness "whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is the source of life. This then is the pattern of extraordinary care in proximity to God's holiness.

Conclusion: How is this done?

Souls are delicate vessels. The devil, the world, and our sinful nature contaminate, defile, and tear souls apart, yours and mine included. The aim of this essay has been to establish a pattern of extraordinary care of souls in proximity to God's holiness. The last component of this project then is to provide some brief approaches on how the extraordinary pastoral care of souls in proximity to God's holiness can be carried out among the vast maladies and varying afflictions that people endure today. Please note, the following considerations aim to help establish a pastoral habitus (habit or manner of care) rather than prescribe exactly what must be done. In other words, they are designed to help the pastor identify what types of care, that is, what types of cognitive reframing, emotional unveiling, imaginative engaging, and spiritual sustaining, are needed to refine the conscience and give care to a troubled soul.

Some questions will help us consider how to develop this habitus. To begin, how would a pastor provide this type of extraordinary care face to face with a person, and what specific method or content does he use to do it? What specific steps might a pastor take to purify the hearts (conscience) and sanctify the souls of his people personally apart from the Divine Service? How does a pastor use God's most holy Word, His most holy name, and the holy sacraments to do this personally to them? More specifically, how might the extraordinary care given to a woman who has been sexually abused differ from a man who is addicted to pornography? Even more, how might pastors administer God's holiness to people in prayer or in blessing, in teaching Law and Gospel, the declaration of deliverance, in confession, or in renunciation? Being mindful of such situations and applications will help provide a beginning practical framework for the extraordinary care of souls in proximity to God's holiness. What I offer below are some

possible methods and a sample template regarding face-to-face extraordinary care in developing a habitus of care.

Methods of extraordinary care

1. Caring Conversations: This is simply the beginning point of extraordinary care. Part of this process involves creating a safe, comfortable, and confidential one-on-one pastoral care environment for the troubled soul to openly express the malady, sin, or struggle of life that afflicts them. The desire is to offer the troubled soul compassionate listening and understanding so the curative remedy of God's holiness can be readily, regularly, and ritually received. Thus, active listening, a compassionate voice, and a calm demeanor are important to facilitating these conversations. A pattern of listening might be: listen – clarify – listen – ask – listen – clarify – listen – ask. Utilizing this listening skill will foster the ability to better diagnose a particular spiritual condition. As noted earlier, when the time is right, one other consideration is perhaps the use or eventual use of sacred space (chancel, kneeler, or altar) and liturgical aesthetics and rituals (vestments, anointing oil, or candles) to accompany these conversations and enactments of pastoral care.

2. Diagnosing the Malady: Once adequate listening and understanding has taken place, steps toward diagnosis can begin. Helpful to this process is to review with the individual the impressions that were received, i.e. the circumstances of the person's life, the problems they are enduring, the feelings they have, and the temptations they face. Begin peeling back the various layers of affliction. In other words, like a physician, the pastor begins with the presenting symptoms and works toward a diagnosis and cure. What is their chief complaint? What spiritual symptoms can be detected? What responses are emerging? How are they handling things on their own? How is the individual functioning? Healthy or unhealthy? Inwardly as well as outwardly? Note that a combination of symptoms may be observed. They may not in and of themselves be the problem. Rather they may disclose the particular misbelief, unique idolatry, deep wound, or affront that lies at the heart of their spiritual condition or malady.

3. Categories of symptoms

It's important to be mindful of the various categories of symptoms so that an accurate diagnosis might be obtained and correspondingly proper cure offered. Careful consideration for the *Spiritual*, *Emotional*, and *Physical* symptoms that are being manifested, along with particular *Behavior patterns*, is a significant step toward proper diagnosis and cure. Often spiritual distress may be accompanied by emotional and physical symptoms, for which examination and treatment by

qualified therapists and physicians may be necessary. (In fact, pastoral care should not be substituted for the quality work of a specialized mental health therapist that may also be needed. There can be great benefit in a pastor and therapist working together for the good of a troubled soul.) Below are two charts that can help give shape and understanding to the diagnostic process.³²

Spiritual Symptom(s)

- Defilement
- Guilt
- Shame
- Remorse
- Grief
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Idolatry
- Pride
- Anger
- Desire for Revenge
- Misbelief
- Despair
- Hopelessness
- Doubt
- Unbelief
- Inability to Pray
- Inability to Forgive
- Unwillingness to Forgive
- Worship Reluctance
- Worship Rejection

Physical Symptom(s)

- Sleep Disruption
- Appetite Disruption
- Sexual Disruption
- Weight Change
- Attention Difficulty
- Diminished Energy
- Exhaustion
- GI Distress
- Elevated Pulse
- Elevated Blood Pressure
- Speech Irregularities
- Self-Mutilation
- Suicidal Gestures
- Thought Disorder
- Cognitive Limitations

Emotional Symptom(s)

- Indifference/Apathy
- Frustration
- Exasperation
- Paralysis
- Frenzy
- Resentment
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Hyperactivity
- Agitation
- Obsessions
- Compulsions
- Impulsivity
- Impatience
- Irritability
- Mood Swings
- Narcissism
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Paranoid Traits
- Delusional Thinking
- Hysterical Traits

Behavior Pattern(s)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage Difficulty | <input type="checkbox"/> Truth Avoidance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Ineffectiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Habitual Lying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rebellious Behavior | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Avoidance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Skills Deficit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Abuse/Addiction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hyperactivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Perversion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation/Avoidance | <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Identity Confusion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Introversion | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug Abuse/Addiction |

One can use these charts as helpful diagnostic resources. They can be used by placing a check by all of the symptoms that appear to be present in any particular situation. Then one can go back and place a "V" (victim) at every check mark where a particular individual appears to be sinned against or feeling the impact of a

³² All charts borrowed from class handouts from Dr. Harold Senkbeil's 2007 Advanced Pastoral Theology class.

broken, fallen world. Then again go back and place a “P” (perpetrator) at every check mark where the individual appears to be the sinner (discerning where one is able, whether or not the person is penitent or impenitent). Finally, give consideration to what might be the unique misbelief, idolatry, or affliction that seems to be the root of the individuals’ distress, difficulty, sin, or overall condition. Please remember that these resources are meant to aid the pastor in developing a pastoral mindset of care—habitus (habit)—rather than prescribing every exact step he must take to give care.

4. Creating Care Plans: Ongoing curative pastoral care plans & daily

sanctification plans: Below is another chart that can be used to help develop a curative framework and help identify what specific curative actions a pastor can take to bring God’s holiness to bear upon a troubled soul. It must be stressed that the idea here is not to shortchange the responsiveness and adaptability of a pastor that may be needed to address the shifting circumstances of a particular troubled soul. Flexibility, rather than rigidity, is a hallmark of a good seelsorger. Again, the point of these charts is to help a pastor develop a specific, yet flexible habitus of care for the various troubled souls in his flock. It is with that understanding in mind that these charts have been set forward. Accordingly, once the symptoms are identified and a diagnosis of the various maladies is made, this chart can be used as a means (framework) to help provide specific, ongoing extraordinary pastoral care for the individual. At the same time, it can also be used to help direct troubled souls in their own daily sanctification plan as they live life in between the Divine Service and extraordinary pastoral care visits.

Pastoral Care	Priorities	Date	Date	Date	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening					
<input type="checkbox"/> Catechesis					
<input type="checkbox"/> Admonition					
<input type="checkbox"/> Rebuking					
<input type="checkbox"/> Correction					
<input type="checkbox"/> Consolation					
<input type="checkbox"/> Confession					
<input type="checkbox"/> Absolution					
<input type="checkbox"/> Exhortation					
<input type="checkbox"/> Prayer					
<input type="checkbox"/> Blessing					

Once listening and understanding have taken place and the maladies have been diagnosed, now comes the time to enact God’s holiness upon the troubled soul. The application of God’s holiness will be specific to the malady that has been diagnosed.

This means that the way in which pastors speak God's Word, apply His holiness, pray for the soul, administer the Holy Supper, and bless them with God's holy name will be done with specific mention and reference to the presenting malady and affliction of the troubled soul.

For example, the holiness applied to a man addicted to pornography will be applied differently than the holiness applied to a woman who was sexually abused. Though the holiness of God is the same, its specific application with each troubled soul is different. The malady of the man addicted to pornography—though undoubtedly involving numerous dimensions that may include, among other things, a learned self-treatment of acedia (spiritual apathy and slothfulness) and self-treatment of emotional pain—is rooted in violations against God's will and commandments. Of course, careful and repeated exhortation and exploration of the troubled soul through conversations using God's Word (Law and Gospel) will be needed to carefully and compassionately treat the various underlying issues. Nonetheless, as the behavior is a violation of God's Law, guilt will very likely be one of the core maladies afflicting the individual. (By no means will it be the only malady. Shame will certainly also be present. However, for the purposes of demonstration, guilt is the particular malady being addressed here. Shame will be addressed later.)

One manner in which God's holiness can be applied for this specific malady is through confession and absolution. This can be done formally (following the liturgical rite and the pastor being vested) or informally (in the pastor's office amid the caring conversation) to purify his guilty conscience and prepare him to participate in a life of God's holiness as a freed, redeemed, cleansed child of God. Likewise, a blessing can be bestowed by the pastor placing his hand upon the troubled souls' head and blessing him with God's holy triune name; the same name that was placed upon him in Baptism. Engaging the physical senses in this way helps fortify the truth that blessing is active, performative speech that gives what it bespeaks. That is why pastors are specific in the language used to assure the troubled soul of what is being done. In other words, it's not, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," but rather, "The Lord bless you and keep you." Such blessings deliver certainty and enact God's holiness upon the troubled soul. Undoubtedly, this will not be a one-time session and will very likely need to be repeated, particularly as the depths of contamination are discovered and diagnosed. Contrast this with a woman who has endured the horror of sexual abuse. She too is sure to have a bad conscience, and may even think it's her fault. However, peeling back the layers of her soul and utilizing careful diagnosis will help identify that she has been the victim of sin and is not the perpetrator. In other words, the guilt lies with the perpetrator and not her. Nonetheless she still suffers immensely and horribly from the shame he has inflicted upon her. That shame has undoubtedly wreaked havoc on her

life and contaminated her in countless ways. The consolation of God's holiness can bring cleansing to this defiled soul. Repeated careful enactment of God's Holy Word upon her troubled conscience can bring relief and renewal. For example, making use of what I above noted as the evocative transference of God's Word could be a helpful tool in delivering God's holiness. Utilizing the narrative Word of God in a way that allows for cognitive reframing, emotional unveiling, imaginative engaging, and spiritual sustaining can bring the light of God's holiness upon the various wounds of the soul.

Specifically, it would be done by proclaiming a particular portion of the narrative of Scripture, tapping into the emotion and vividness of that narrative and bringing it to bear upon the troubled soul in a way that unlocks the hurt and emotion of their own soul where they can see themselves in the narrative as the one receiving the compassion and holiness that Jesus delivers. In this case, perhaps the use of Luke 10:25-37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan) could be used. The portrayal of someone being assaulted, beaten, stripped, left for half dead, and then deemed too unclean to be worthy of help could very well resonate with the abused woman. Bringing her into the story and letting her hear how Jesus—the Good Samaritan—has washed her, cleansed her, paid for her, bound up her wounds, and cares for her, can enact God's holy Word upon her troubled soul and bring the purging forces of that Word to bear upon the injustice and trauma that she has endured.

Another more formal example can be the pastor laying his hands upon her head and speaking 1 John 1:7 over her (after adequate conversation about the verse). This too can be an incredibly powerful outpouring of God's holiness upon this fragile soul: "The blood of Jesus cleanses [you] from all sin," meaning, the sin that has been perpetrated so cruelly against her has been absorbed and removed from her by the blood of Christ. He had it nailed to His body, then He took it far away and buried in the tomb, leaving it there and bringing to her His resurrection hope and renewal of new life.

If appropriate, this could then be followed by the administration of the Lord's Supper where the body and blood of Christ is given into her mouth (with the context of this great sin against her in mind), where that very body and blood sacramentally delivers the remission (removal) of all sin and strengthens her faith. In other words, it purges from her the spiritual contamination of the abuse she suffered, frees her from the shame that it created, imputes to her the purity of Christ to cleanse and sanctify her body, and brings soothing healing to her soul. Obviously, this too is not a one-time occurrence, nor will it necessarily automatically relieve all of the mental anguish she relives. It may need to be repeated regularly and ritually (formally), with great care and compassion, as the contaminating effects of that sin against her may emotionally remain and be relived repeatedly.

More could be said, but a framework of extraordinary care in proximity to God's holiness has been outlined. What remains to be done for the troubled soul, then, is to offer a framework for developing a personal sanctification plan, or in other words, a daily devotional plan. The diagnosis process discussed above can be helpful in crafting a specific daily devotional plan for the troubled soul that will aid them in the midst of their affliction and daily life. Identifying various portions of Scripture for them to read out loud and hear the living voice of the Gospel will be essential.

The apostle Paul puts it like this: "Everything created by God...is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Encouraging the troubled soul with this passage aims to urge them on in their sanctified life to daily receive the holiness of Christ through Scripture and prayer. "God's Word makes people and things holy. Through faith and its enactment in prayer we borrow holiness from God. We never possess God's holiness, just as we never possess love, life, light, or friendship; we have the Word only as we keep on receiving it from God, drawing on it from Him and our contact with Him. He shares His holiness with us through His Word."³³ This is a significant part of their curative plan designed to keep them in close proximity to God's holiness. Thus, identifying specific Scripture texts, prayers (both to be spoken out loud), hymns, and accompanying rituals (like the sign of the cross or the lighting of candles) are important elements to include as part of this plan.

This is a general framework for a personal sanctification plan. The basic elements might remain the same from person to person (i.e. Scripture, prayer, hymn, ritual), but the particular content of each element (which verses, prayers, hymns, and rituals) would be tailored to aid in treating the specific malady of each individual, where it would tie into the care given in the Divine Service, as well as the extraordinary care given through pastoral care sessions.

A Case Study

Finally, in an effort to demonstrate further possibilities of maintaining proximity to God's holiness in our digital age, I have included a case study of an extremely troubled soul. We will call him Oscar. He experienced traumatic and significant fights with his brother that ultimately led him to leave the dairy farm operation and business they had started together. He suffers from great bitterness, anger, and resentment and continually endures a sort of spiritual PTSD as he relives the experience, but sin in relation to self is his primary mode of spiritual interpretation. He is an intelligent young

³³ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, p.278

man, but he also desperately struggles with anxiety, doubt, and disappointment with God. He is faithful in attending the Divine Service and Bible class, but remains a troubled and tormented soul. I have been working with him for more than three years, meeting with him frequently. However, in between meetings and the Divine Service, I also correspond with him via email in the form of pastoral letters, attempting to keep him in close proximity to God's holiness. This is also a reminder that pastoral letters (even if electronic in form) can be a profound source of solace and consolation as the soul is cared for by both ordinary and extraordinary means.

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Thursday, July 18, 2013 3:13 PM

Hello Pastor Woodford.

As I mentioned on Sunday, thank you for the sermon. At face value, the story of the Good Samaritan seems to have a simple message of "do good to others." However, as you mentioned in your sermon, it has a deeper meaning of Jesus questioning the lawyer of who his neighbors really are. It made the lawyer realize that EVERYONE is his neighbor.

The part of the sermon I could not understand was at the very end when you linked the good Samaritan with Jesus. The message was that Jesus is the perfect good Samaritan while we as humans fall short. I can't help but think, "Just how good of a Samaritan IS Jesus?" Sure he gives us his "word" and "sacraments." His word TELLS us that he's with us and loves us. His Sacraments give us a forgiveness of sins so that we don't go to hell when we die. But REALLY, in REAL LIFE, when is Jesus EVER a good Samaritan? I remember back in the days of my brother bullying me that I would curl up on the floor alone in my house on the floor. There WAS NO good Samaritan—Jesus—there to comfort me. I took care of myself, toughed it out, and got myself to where I am today.

In much more extreme examples, in the face of Christian persecution in Africa, I read on Pastor May's facebook page of a Catholic priest beheading. It makes me angry at God, sick to my stomach, sad and depressed to think that that Catholic priest, a man who gave his life for Jesus, died to the hands of Muslim with a knife! Jesus would say, "Oh but I was with him when he died... I was with him through my sacraments and through Bible verses that the guy could think about while he was being tortured." In all honesty, when that knife was rubbing on that man's neck, what good WERE those measly drops of water on his infant head, bread, wine, and memorized Bible verses? What that man needed was a REAL, PRESENT good Samaritan to comfort him. NOT words on pieces of paper in the Bible TELLING him that Jesus is in his "midst".

Our recent study of Revelation makes my heart sink every Sunday. I cringe when I see the similarities we are facing today to that of the early Christians. I believe what I'm feeling is an example of Revelation where eating the scroll has a sour taste. I do not want to stop going to Bible study because simply hiding from the truth is not the right thing to do. For comfort, I've read Hebrews 11 – 12 and the faith of these great men in history. It scares me to think of what I may be required to go through in this life. And all I have to get me through it is my faith: my belief in the crucifixion, Baptism water, and bread/wine. These

things are great, but when that knife in the hand of a Muslim hits my neck, those stinking sacraments just won't cut it. Jesus "claims" to be the perfect good Samaritan, but in the "here and now," he appears to be a quiet, invisible man "in my midst."

Would you have some time next week to discuss? I feel bad that I have made no progress and you're probably wondering why I can't just accept these truths and move on.

Thank you.

Oscar

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Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2013, 10:56

Hi Oscar,

Sorry for the delay in response. Friday could work for me, just let me know what might work.

In the meantime, remember that the cycle you revert to is looking for absolute objective physical proof that Jesus is in your midst and doing the things and offering the comfort that Scripture speaks of, but only in a purely physical form. When that doesn't fit what you are demanding, your practice is to play "gotcha" with God. That is, "See I knew you are not as loving or gracious or present as you say you are." And therefore you use it to ridicule faith (and therefore those who have that faith) as simpletons who are foolish and stupidly misled.

But as we have discussed, faith is spiritual and not simply physical. Yes, of course the physical is and will be part of it—as the creed says, "I believe... in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." But right now, as you live, faith is the assurance of the things unseen and the hope of the things to come. Faith has as its object the word of God, which means even when the physical tells us something different, God's word remains faithful and true, even when we are not.

Remember, suffering and death are in fact guarantees that Jesus has said we would endure. He endured them as well, for your sake. When you demand that God make everything perfect and no bad thing be allowed to afflict you, you neglect that profound impact that sin, (others, as well as yours and mine included), has had upon this world, and how God very often permits the consequences of sin to run its course—sometimes to draw us closer to himself.

Thus, faith is not belief that nothing bad will ever happen, but belief that Jesus has taken the curse of sin and the fullness of God's wrath upon himself, and showed us that He will, in the end, set all things right. This faith allows us to endure the afflictions of this world, the heartaches of this life, and the tragedies of this time with a confidence that the tomb will not stay sealed, that death will not triumph, and that evil will not win.

In other words, faith sees through the bad things of life—even when bad things happen to good people or Christian people or innocent people. This doesn't mean we don't hurt, get angry, or even question our faith, it means faith is more than our physical, emotional, and mental circumstances, but it is the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. Reducing faith to reason or knowledge, or to the physical proof that God is there, remakes faith into an object of our doing or our demands, rather than the objective truth of Jesus Christ as the crucified, risen, reigning, and returning Lord of Lords and King of all Kings.

Until we chat again,

Pastor Woodford

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Sent: Tuesday, January 07, 2014 11:35 AM

Hello Pastor Woodford.

I called the church office today and asked if I could set up an appointment to see you on Thursday...

The reason I want to meet is because I'm struggling with fear of our upcoming Bible study of tolerance. I understand the concept of non-Christians being intolerant of supposedly intolerant Christians against gay marriage. And believe me, I agree with you on the subject but am driven into despair even discussing the topic. I've actually considered skipping the next six weeks of Bible study out of fear—again, not because I'm against what you're preaching, but because the subject causes me to be consumed with fear. On the other hand, I know that hiding myself from the truth may not be the correct solution either.

I have forwarded a previous mail from you that I often read for reassurance because it talks about faith in things unseen. I do not doubt that there are spiritual things going on that we cannot see, and I certainly do not consider you as an instructor as a "simpleton" because you have much higher level of education than I do. My biggest issue is that I simply don't care about what is going on in the spiritual, invisible world. I worry about the things I CAN see and the direction this country is in—morals being ignored, evil turning good, Christian persecution becoming more real. I believe there are spiritual things going on in the invisible world, but my fear is of the SEEN and VISIBLE world that I live in.

Let me know if a time works on Thursday to discuss. Thank you.

Oscar

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Date: Tue, 7 Jan 2014 12:40

Hi Oscar,

Let's say 9:30 on Thursday morning. And as just a bit of encouragement until then I will offer you these words: The concern for the spiritual side of things remains important precisely because it goes hand in hand with the physical side of life. That is to say, the devil is at work preying upon the fallen and sinful nature of human kind, wreaking havoc, trying to create unbelief, false belief, immorality, and other great shame and vice among the people of this country (and world), of which is very often seen and heard in the visible and tangible world in which you and I live. From couples plagued by division and divorce, to states embracing same sex marriage, to abortion, to theft, to murder, Satan is at work to create unbelief in hearts and minds (the spiritual life) so that that their actions and behavior (here and now earthly life) will follow suit.

Should you or I would choose to ignore it or hide from this reality does not therefore lessen Satan's attacks or stop his evil plotting to bring people, governments, countries, and the world to ruin.

Remember, Satan will use any avenue he can to get you, me, and every person of our country to fall into despair and reject the hope that there is in Christ.

For you personally, Satan works hard at promoting the fear of what is going to happen to our country, and especially to Christians and our Christian view of morality and life. Should you choose to ignore his unseen presence and his work of temptation and spiritual evil among the people of this country, that will not therefore lessen his attacks on you or anyone else. Rather it will actually only embolden him because he knows he has you (and others like you) running in fear, and therefore keep working to thwart the hope and life that you can and do have now through Christ.

But you see, here is the deal, Satan is a defeated Devil. Christ has won the victory and continues to fight for you, for me, and all whom he purchased with his precious blood. The Devil would have you forget this victory, be overwhelmed by this life, and fear what is to come with the thought that Jesus has left you, abandoned you, and is laughing at you. But Christ will have none of it. Crucified, dead, and buried, Jesus was raised from the dead to bring life and hope where darkness and disorder abound. He has cast the Devil out of Heaven. He has defeated his lies, and He declares that He (Jesus) is the resurrection and the life. In fact, Jesus is the light that no darkness can overcome. No fear, no sin, no evil, no wrong, and no devil can overcome the power of His light. And where his light is (spiritual truth) there is hope and life to be had and lived. In fact, there is tangible here and now behavior and actions (morality, compassion, care, good works, etc.) that flow from it and go with it.

That is why it is important to remain concerned about the spiritual side of life. And that is why I invite you to rest in that Good News: Jesus Christ has won the victory! The Devil has been defeated. The remission of sins is present. Hope is real. Yes, the Devil roars around like a prowling lion looking for someone to devour, but that is because he is angry. He has lost. He is banished from Heaven, and he seeks to take down as many as he can. This is why Jesus gave us the 6th and 7th petition of the Lord's Prayer, and why Luther was so detailed in their meaning:

"And lead us not into temptation," What does this mean?

"God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, and the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory."

"But deliver us from evil" What does this mean?

"We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, and reputation, and finally when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven."

Oscar, I invite you to pray these often and regularly. Remember, where Christ is, the devil is powerless. And my friend, Christ has claimed you as His own. You have been baptized into His name. He loves you. He has claimed you. He has redeemed you. He fights for you. Every time His body and blood go into you in the Lord's Supper you literally have the life of the world coursing through your veins. He has not left you. He does not abandon you. You are His. He is yours. You are invited to believe it and to live in this grace right here and right now. We can talk about this more on Thursday. The Lord be with you, guard, you and protect you Oscar.

In Christ,
Pastor Woodford

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Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2014 9:25 PM

Hello Pastor Woodford.

I have some questions about your sermon today. You mentioned how the water the Israelites drank was temporary, meaning they will get thirsty again, while the life-giving water Jesus offered the woman at the well is permanent and allows us to never thirst again. My question is, isn't Jesus' life giving water also temporary like real water because we need to constantly repeat it? For example, when we have struggles in life, we remember we live in a sin filled world, admit that we are sinners, and remember that Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins. Then we struggle again, ask for forgiveness, and the cycle continues.

As we've discussed, I have a lot of fear about the secular world we live in, the future of this country, and what my future children's lives would be like in this world several years from now. The part in your sermon today where you said Jesus' life-giving water frees us from fear was hard for me to hear because I certainly feel as though Jesus hasn't freed me from my fear. I understand that it's not magic and Jesus doesn't just snap his fingers and it's gone, but I've tried all the resources he has given me and none of them have seemed to work—I've talked to counselors, read Psalms, the small Catechism, and several books of the Bible. I understand the technicalities of how Jesus works —of how Jesus doesn't live in time like we do and how he does remove our fears but in his time and not ours, or how Jesus spiritually removes our fears but we just cannot feel it in the physical world, or how Jesus removed the sin of the fear when he died on the cross but leaves us to deal with the effects of the fear today. To me, all of these explanations of how God works just get mumbled up into something a smooth talking lawyer would explain something.

What do we do when we feel Jesus has not fulfilled his promise of giving us life-giving water? Is there anything else I can try that will help me get rid of my fear?

Thank you,
Oscar

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Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2014, 5:24 PM

Hi Oscar,

You are not alone in feeling disappointment with God. I know you seek visceral and emotional relief. The evil one is hard at work and afflicts you (and me) regularly. Satan is at work in your fears and in this world. I know the peace you seek. I seek it too. The angst can be overwhelming and the fear absolutely stifling. But Jesus is a promise keeper. Satan will seek to deceive you. He will tell you Jesus has abandoned you, and that He is not present in this world. He will attempt to get you to look for hope and comfort in all things except Christ. I know. He does it to me as well. And believe it or not, I suffer from a similar reoccurring unrest.

But here is the deal. Remember that the promise of Jesus which you speak of only comes through death. First, His own death and subsequently your death. This includes death to sin, death to selfishness, and ultimately death to self. It includes both a spiritual and a temporal death. And until that temporal death occurs, (which in itself can be terribly frightening) we must daily die and rise with Christ in Baptism.

Oscar, the thirst you have is deep. You are parched. You crave relief. You desire peace. I know. I have seen it many times in your eyes. When I am preaching, I see the hurt on your face and the desperation in your demeanor. I see the tears and I see the anger. I know the hurt you have inside. And I know the relief you crave. You want to drink. In fact, the things that you listed as doing amount to a whole barrel of life giving water from which you can drink.

There is much life in this water. And you are angry, even accusing Jesus of not keeping His promises to you, because it feels as if Jesus has abandoned you. Perhaps you feel your face is wet with this water, but you have received none of the benefits that come from it. And you're angry, at wits end, and even crying foul at what you feel to be slick talk. Oscar, I think that's because you have poured out gallons and gallons of this life giving water upon your face, even opening your mouth to drink it all down, (and I know you long to feel its refreshment!) but because of your anger, your fear, and your hurt, you refuse to swallow it. So it simply splashes across your face, wets your mouth, and leaves you feeling empty and dry.

Reading Gods' Word, reading the catechism, and understanding all the technicalities of Jesus are fine activities, but when they are done absent of the hard realities of faith, it's like standing in the desert dying of thirst, and pouring a jug of life giving water into your mouth, but refusing to swallow because you haven't swallowed for so long you're worried it will hurt too bad.

Oscar, the hard realities of faith include your willing release of the anger, the angst, the hatred, and the fears of your life into the crucified hands and feet of your Savior Jesus Christ. It includes praying the prayers you fight against praying, and putting to death what you feel you're entitled to have. It includes dying with Christ and all the fears that go with such a death. The life giving water of Christ is powerful and full of life, but for that life to take root, death must first be embraced. Until then, the water will merely splash across your face and feel more like a slap in the face.

As Jesus told the Samaritan woman to go get her husband, He did so knowing the burdens, the guilt, and the shame (five husbands and a live in boyfriend) that weighed her down, and how His life giving water is exactly for those who are willing to swallow both the death and the life this water brings. Oscar, this is the water that Jesus offers to you. The fears that you have can find relief in the death and resurrection of Christ. I know, the death part hurts and is frightening. But it is what Jesus does when He bids us follow Him: He bids a man come and die.

That's what I believe you're fighting against, dying to yourself. Satan constantly tempts you to take comfort and solace in the things of this world rather than in what Christ has done for you, to you, and in you by the water and Word of Holy Baptism and through His here and now presence in the Lord's Supper. In fact, consider what one theologian wrote about the Lord's Supper: "Let us go to the Lord's Supper as if we are going to our death, so that when we are going to our death it will be as if we are going to the Lord's Supper."

Oscar, Jesus offers His life giving water to you. You're invited to drink of it and receive its benefits. But to do that, you must be willing to swallow it and accept the hard realities of faith that come from being a broken sinner who lives in a fallen and broken world. Jesus loves you. He will never stop loving you! Give your hurt to Him and drink from the water of life He so freely gives. I have attached my sermon for you here as well.

The Lord be with you Oscar.

In Christ,

Pastor Woodford

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Sent: Tuesday, July 22, 2014 1:06 PM

Hello Pastor Woodford,

I have some thoughts to share with you about a devotion I read this morning. It was the old testament story of Palestinians stealing the ark of the covenant, storing it by their statue "god", and sending it back to the Israelites because of all the heart ache it caused (I apologize for watering down the story, but I'm sure you're familiar with it).

This story has fascinated me since I was a child, and I enjoy thinking about the questions that come to mind. For example, what did the people think when they saw their statue god bowing before the ark of the covenant? What an eerie sight to see your god bowing to the ark. Some could assume it a coincidence the first time, but it happened twice! The fact that the statue fell fills us with wonder and shows some of God's humor at the same time - when they perch their idol back up it falls again. Then, the story explains that they decided to get rid of the ark in order to protect their god - how ironic! Why didn't they think to themselves, "Why are we worshipping this god that can't even protect itself?" The next part of the story also fascinates me - when they send two cows to deliver the ark back to the Israelites. I could imagine today trying to direct cows to move where you want them too. They would turn in circles, get distracted by a patch of grass, get spooked, run in the opposite direction you want them to go.

But scripture says these cows "did not turn their heads" - they were on a mission to get the ark from point A to point B. What another amazing, yet eerie sight! Imagine being a spectator in the desert and seeing two unattended cows, confidently delivering the ark of the covenant. Was an angel leading them? Did God program their heads to walk a certain direction? Were they led by some sort of scent? The Bible does not tell us the details, it just explains that the cows delivered the ark back to the Israelites.

It's fun to imagine the logistics of the story, but I've also been thinking about what the message means to us today and how it relates to our discussions of fearing the Lord. The ark of the covenant caused the Palestinians a lot of fear. It gave them tumors, killed some of them, and even caused their god to bow down to it. I believe God was telling the Palestinians, "Don't fear that silly false idol, fear the ark!" Perhaps God was giving them a chance to repent, turn away from the idol, and worship the real God. Take it one step further today when horrible things happen - earthquakes, corrupt governments, sickness—Could God be saying, "Don't fear these things. Fear me!" Do you have any thoughts?

Thank you.

Oscar

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Sent: Tuesday, July 28, 2014 9:49 PM

Dear Oscar,

As I mentioned to you in person, I wanted to affirm your thoughts on this Bible account and use it as a foundation to build on for our conversations.

Though you may feel frustrated as we rehash some of the same things over and over in our sessions, I think you made some significant strides forward in identifying the maladies that ail you. Though that does not necessarily ease your pain and unrest, I think it's significant in that it creates a new frame of reference for you to think about things.

As you noted, that bible story is a great reminder that we are to fear the Lord far more than the things of this world, be it "earthquakes, corrupt governments, sickness" or the like. However, what I would add to that is that even in the midst of whatever tribulations come your way, God's desire is that you rest in his "love" and that you "trust" in him. And as we have discovered, that is very hard for you right now. You have the "fear" part down, but it is the "love" and "trust" portion of faith that plagues you immensely.

Oscar, I think you are catching glimpses of what you need to "get," but the old evil foe has sworn to work you woe. He keeps at you, bringing you back into old patterns of false belief and digressing into a spiral of arguments against God so that you will not allow yourself to love and trust in God. As such, I think it is important that we continue to meet together for some time, even if you think you "get" it now. That will simply be Satan's voice trying to get you to go it alone again, when in reality you're in a very fragile state. In fact, my goal is not for you to say "I get it," but to move you to a point of genuine love and trust in God so that you can joyfully say "I love Jesus!"

Right now, Oscar, the good news is that you are beginning to realize and identify (with the aid of your wife and myself) all of your routine temptations where, as the sixth petition reminds, the devil, the world, and your sinful nature are deceiving and misleading you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

So I think it helpful to note that one of your routine misbeliefs is to reduce faith to a body of right knowledge merely as a means to get to heaven. We have talked about this numerous times, but it's good to have it in writing so that you can constantly remind yourself of it. As we discussed, I think you have created this false belief, at least in part, as a defense mechanism and protest against God for what you consider to be God's complete failure of keeping you from the trauma, heartache, and misery you endured from your brother and that whole corresponding mess.

Thus, Oscar, you cling to the "fear" part of faith, but are nearly always melting under the weight of the fear of going to Hell. But be assured that God's desire, my desire, and your wife's desire is to get you to the point that your fear of Hell is overpowered by your fear, love, and trust in God above all things. It will take some time, but you are on the right path my friend. So keep it up, as difficult or confusing as it may seem.

As such, I think it will also be very helpful to identify and enumerate the other lines of false belief that you mentally and verbally digress into. As I talked about in Sunday's sermon (I have attached it here for you), such false belief and idolatry—sin— will only contaminate your conscience and routinely bring you to the point of despair.

But here is where your wife and I can be of assistance to you in the name of the Lord. As we discussed together, it will be good to call you to "repentance" when these false beliefs are radiating out and contaminating you and others around you. Please understand I say the word "repentance" not as heavy

handed matter, but as part of the natural spiritual cleansing process. For, as we have discussed in that Bob Newhart video, you do need to “Stop it!” That is, to stop the endless cycle of negative thoughts and the fueling of your false belief. In other words, stop indulging in what I would say are your toxic and obsessive ruminations, where you endlessly stew on these false beliefs and get all worked up. Instead, begin thinking on what is true, right, just, and praise worthy (Philippians 4:8) so that the Word of Christ can dwell in you richly (Col. 3:16) to purify and cleanse your burdened conscience and lead you to a more complete and joy filled faith of being able to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Identifying the other false beliefs will also be important to treat the polluting and defiling effects they have upon you. It will also provide you with the readiness to receive the holiness of Christ to spiritually decontaminate you and ultimately bring you to the joy of being a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), which will also bring the corresponding new creation of “thought” and “being” in you. It is all part of the daily baptismal life—of dying and rising in Christ. Of course, this is not a magical wave of the wand, but a regular and routine return to Christ and His holiness to purify the regular and routine contamination of your false beliefs, shame, despair, and any other shame and vice that have resulted.

To this point Oscar, we have identified multiple points of false belief. In addition to the one mentioned above (reducing faith to a body of right knowledge to get you to heaven) we have also identified the following misbeliefs: 1) That Jesus is just some stupid invisible person that really is not there or does not really help us. 2) That Jesus is, as you have said, like a “dead beat dad.” 3) That God acts capriciously and unfairly, doing whatever He wants, offering us nothing of the here and now kind of hope or peace we want or need. 4) That sin is merely just bad deeds that require knowledge of Jesus to remove it and get us to heaven. 5) That God does not talk to us today and his book (the bible) is basically a generic set of writings.

Oscar, when you digress into one of these (or any other) tirades of false belief (be sure to note any other ones as well) I want you to begin calling yourself on it and repent, but then also be open to me or your bride being able to call you on it, where you return to the first commandment and the sixth petition and their meanings for constant perspective. And when you experience contrition and grief, simply go to what you confess in the Apostles’ Creed and pray in the Lord’s Prayer (and actually pray them both out loud). There is profound hope and certainly of what is good, true, and comforting in those very liturgical elements which you know so well.

Ultimately, as I mentioned at our last meeting, the desire of this process will be to get you to go from viewing Jesus as merely a “bad deed remover” and “dispenser of tickets to heaven” to the Lord of your life, and Lord over all, who desperately loves you, sanctifies you, fights for you (and your wife), and calls you to take up your cross and follow him in all aspects of life. In other words, my hope for you is for you to shift from seeing Jesus as this impersonal figure who can get you to heaven, to that of seeing him as someone you love, rely upon, and desire to be with—in other words—adding in the “love and trust” portion of faith. Make sense?

As another practical matter, I want you to consider how you can continue to care for your wife even as she cares for you. As we discussed, the business of caring for someone in need can often times be a helpful remedy, or at least a helpful distraction, from the mental digressions that often plague you. Thus, keep throwing yourself into caring for your wonderful bride, as you have been doing already.

One final thought for now: Be certain that the Devil, the world, and your sinful nature will tempt you to go down the same old paths of false belief, despair, shame, and vice. However, Satan has been defeated.

He does not have power over you. Baptized into Christ you are a new creation. His holiness purifies you and renews you. He fights for you and stands by you. Your wedding Hymn is a constant reminder of this:

657 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

1 A mighty fortress is our God, A sword and shield victorious; He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod And wins salvation glorious. The old satanic foe Has sworn to work us woe. With craft and dreadful might He arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal.

2 No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, Whom God Himself elected. You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is He, Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored. He holds the field victorious.

3 Though hordes of devils fill the land All threat'ning to devour us, We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot overpower us. Let this world's tyrant rage; In battle we'll engage. His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.

4 God's Word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes, who fear it; For God Himself fights by our side With weapons of the Spirit. Were they to take our house, Goods, honor, child, or spouse, Though life be wrenched away, They cannot win the day. The Kingdom's ours forever!

Oscar, Christ is your comfort, He sends His Spirit to comfort you and intercede for you even when you can't give expression to your hurt and pain. Let the epistle lesson from Sunday wash over you and bring hope to you now and always.

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8: 35-39.

In Christ,

Pastor Woodford

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