Becoming

a

Shepherd

THE PASTORAL JOURNEY *of* TRANSFORMATION & IMAGINATION

Submitted to the faculty of Western Seminary

for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

Jordan Warner

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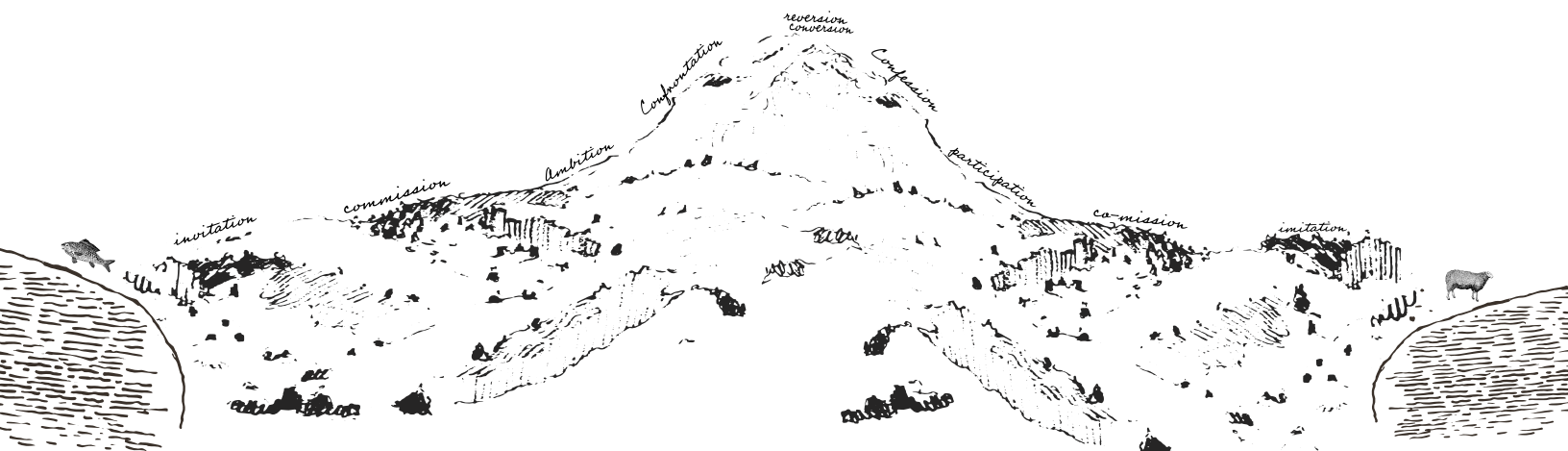
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D.MIN. Project

TITLE *of* PROJECT

Becoming a Shepherd: The Pastoral Journey of Transformation and Imagination

AUTHOR

Jordan Warner

PROJECT COMMITTEE

Rev. Dr. Winn Collier (Internal Reader)	*Date* 1/9/24
Rev. Mandy Smith (External Reader)	*Date* 9 Jan 2024
Rev. Dr. Trygve Johnson (External Reader)	*Date* 1/9/24

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A NOTE *to the* READER

At various points in this project, you'll find QR codes embedded in the text. Scanning these with the camera app on your phone will lead to a video or piece of music that is intended to deepen our imagination for Peter's transformational story.

Many thanks to Will Reagan for permission to use music from United Pursuit's *Endless Years* album, which has become, for me, the soundtrack of Peter's journey.[1]

And, many thanks to Eric and Kristin Hill for permission to use their stunning photography from the Sea of Galilee, which originally appeared in their book *The First Breakfast*, and was captured by Hannah Elizabeth Taylor.[2]

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[1] Will Reagan & United Pursuit, *Endless Years.* United Pursuit Records 2012, Spotify audio.
[2] Eric and Kristin Hill and Hannah Elizabeth Taylor, *The First Breakfast: A Journey with Jesus and Peter through Calling, Brokenness, and Restoration* (Milton: Withyou Ministries, 2019), 10.

ABSTRACT: BECOMING *a* SHEPHERD

In this work, I hope to spur pastors toward deepening *transformation* into the way of Jesus (maturing personhood and presence) and deepening *imagination* for the work of Jesus (the pictures, postures, and practices of daily ministry). To that end, this project is divided into three parts, each an essential element of this pastoral pilgrimage: *Journey*, *Transformation*, and *Imagination*.

In Part One, we'll explore the ministry challenges before us, asking how we can heal the divides within and promote wholeness in our churches. We will be reminded that both Scripture as a whole and our lives as pastors are stories of *journey*.

In Part Two, we'll follow St. Peter's paradigmatic life of pastoral *transformation*. With Peter as our model and mentor, we'll discover how a luminous, story-shaping call to ministry gives birth to an unexpectedly wild yet eventually whole life.

Peter's archetypal journey requires of him what the pastoral life requires of us: We, like Peter, name who Christ is but then are renamed by him; we are enraptured by new things we see in Jesus, then dazed and dazzled to find he sees new things in us; we model our lives after Christ, only to discover he has been quietly remodeling us the entire time.

Like Peter, we lose our way in the pulls of anxiety and ambition. We oscillate between cruciformity and control as we learn (or rather unlearn) how leadership works in the surprising pattern of Jesus. We doubt and deny in the darkness, then are restored again at daybreak. In the end, we are invited to imitate Christ, to participate in the divine nature, to lay our lives down. We'll find that pastoring as good shepherds involves an ongoing invitation to death and resurrection.

In Part Three, we apply all this to our pastoral theology and practice. As we notice God *imaginatively* at play in the major turning points of Peter's life, we'll wonder how we,

too, are being restored and restoried. We'll explore how Jesus writes midrash on our memories, and how he exchanges the guiding images we hold for what it means to be a pastor.

Here, I'll make my case that "fishing" was only meant to be Peter's first metaphor for ministry. A further call to "shepherd" was always intended to come later — but Jesus knew Peter could only hear and live it after the first fire of his life had burned out.

For Peter, the shifted calling and imagination is this: "Fish people" becomes "feed sheep." A means of trapping is swapped out for a means of tending. The language of luring is exchanged for the language of loving.

It seems to me the Western church has become obsessed with and hooked on its first task: Ministry fueled by a fishing imagination. Perhaps Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is inviting us also into a more Christlike imagination and posture for our pastoral work.

It will take a while, but as we keep following Jesus, we will be led deeper and deeper into the heart of our vocation. And one day, on some quiet shoreline of our lives, we will be called — by Christ himself — pastors.

PROLOGUE

Pastoring as Pilgrimage

I write this to you whose experience with God is as life-changing as ours...

Grace and peace to you many times over

as you deepen in your experience with God and Jesus, our Master.

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness...

that we may become participants in the divine nature.

ST. PETER

Several years ago, my pastoral career fell apart. *Again*.

Our family had recently moved cross-country in pursuit of a call I couldn't shake, though not for lack of pain or trying. Three kids, two cars, and a 28-foot Penske truck spanned the miles from Midwestern college town to our new home in the Southeast.

We were excited. I had been a pastor a handful of times in a handful of places. But this church seemed different, healthier, maybe. And that mattered — because along the way, I had become wise to doing this work just anyplace and had begun to tell myself I had earned the right to be choosy.

Aiming a packed car toward our new life, I turned a fifty-point inspection checklist over in my mind again:

humble leadership – *check*

simple culture – *check*

robust ecclesiology – *check*

bookshelves filled with the same theologians – *check*

Yes, this seems good. And, as bonus, I wouldn't be at it alone. I was to be the executive pastor, serving alongside someone I had grown to trust over hours of dialogue. We crossed state lines, got a new dog, and set about the work of pastoring again.

Within a year, the pastor I moved to work with crashed hard into a wall — the kind reinforced with stuff stronger than steel, stuff like unresolved family tension, misplaced ministry expectations, and the impossible pressures of church planting. Having run headlong into several of these myself, I understood and was happy to be patient in hopes that healing would come as the process played out.

But for the next eight months, I stood witness on the shore of what seemed a salvage dive, watching as torpedoed wounds and sunk hopes rose to the surface, one by

one. For want of tools to handle all this heartache, that humble leadership culture soon grew toxic. Turns out, my checklist was insufficient for the complexity of all this.

Soon the pastor (my closest friend in the state) had resigned, leaving the church's survival in doubt. One afternoon, head-hung and heart-heavy, I told my wife I needed to mow the lawn. Really, I was after space to lick wounds and raise complaint.

God, how did you let this happen again?

This is the fourth time! (Have I not yet mentioned the other three?)

How long will you ask me to open my heart to this work that always brings pain?

I began to recount the other stories to God, in case he had forgotten. That first church, twenty years earlier, rife with poison theology and abuses of the financial, verbal, and spiritual kinds. The one after that, sincere yet awash in corporate mindsets and a relentless agenda to grow in number and notoriety. And so on.

My grumbling continued — *I thought this church would be different!*

Then, I panicked — *God, I'm the common denominator!*

Finally, I grew curious. How was God coming to me in all this? Was there a possibility for redemption, resurrection even, in this vocational through-line?

The mower had run out of gas a while ago. I trudged inside.

As days turned into months, it became clear that our church, though heavy-laden, would survive. Not long after, they asked me to become their pastor.

I badly wanted to say yes.

I badly wanted to say no.

This is how it has been for me in this work: One hand open with the beauty and wonder of pastoring, another clenched from several rides on a carousel of dysfunction — church conflict, crisis, and corruption.

A crossroads formed before me. I stood before it a long while.

What I knew for sure was I didn't want to be done with ministry. But also, I was *done* with ministry as I had known it, the malformed sort of ministry that functionalized people into pawns, souls into strategies. I looked in the mirror and wondered about this, too: If we pastors desired to lead churches of healing, why were we so reluctant to start with the unhealed depths of our own hearts?

This much was becoming clear: It wouldn't do for me anymore to participate in sweeping pastoral ego under the rug, to rationalize corporate leadership under the banner of Christian leadership, to bless and baptize Babel-building and call it church growth, to do work for Jesus that seemed nothing like the Jesus I knew.

I needed a new motivation, a new mentor, a new metaphor if I was to continue as a pastor. I told God: *If you want me to be a pastor, you need to show me another way.*

For me, that prayer was answered in the life of Saint Peter, particularly the masterful way Jesus re-calls and reorients Peter's understanding of what ministry is all about in John 21.

I had never given much thought to Peter as pastor before. But these last years, Peter's story has come to life for me, and has funded a new way of seeing, a new way of being a pastor. And now, when my car pulls into the church office and I review the day ahead, Pastor Peter is almost always on my mind.

In just three years with Jesus, Peter lived the full sweep of every ministry story I've ever heard. He knows what it is to be called and committed, passionate and presumptuous, charismatic and confounded. Sincerely attempting to lead, Peter misspeaks and missteps publicly all the time. Sword at his side, he knows all about the seasons when we feel unduly attacked, cornered, power-hungry.

There is that day he makes a lifelong vow to the cause, then by sundown has cursed himself and the whole thing. Peter is rebuked, and Peter is restored. Christ calls him a rock to build on, wheat to be sifted, and a satan to get out of sight. When the sun comes up on Peter's darkest night, it finds him naked and ashamed, hiding from his story and the Story in profound self-rejection and reversion.

But, there is *conversion* too. Forgiveness after failure. Restoration to a community of friends, a seat at the table that still has his name on it, and a communion meal of more than enough. On the other side of betrayal and shame, Jesus not only offers Peter forgiveness but fresh vocation.

Now, he is ready to try this work again. Now he's got love to match each denial. He'll guide the early Church and give the Pentecost homily. And in his waning days, he is led where he would rather not go: Into a final following, a cruciform posture, an ultimate participation in the divine nature. Love gets the last word. Yes, for my money, Peter is the New Testament's best picture of how to become a pastor.

In case it's not clear, I said yes to the church. I'm so glad I did.

And just as Peter's conversion from fisher to shepherd was beginning to cement into my imagination, our church was told the building we met in would be demolished within a year. Days after that, the Covid-19 pandemic arrested the world. Soon the boilers of racial injustice and partisan politics had been cranked to high heat, too.

Confounded with anxiety and surrounded by division, my mind turned to Peter. I confessed to the church one Sunday: I don't know how to *lead* us through any of this, but I do know how to *pastor* us in it.

The vocational invitation was now clear. I set about my work to become, more deeply, a shepherd.

Being a Pastor

Being a pastor is hard.

There are plenty of reasons this is true, and it's likely not breaking news to many. Pastoring in our time involves holding grounded presence at the intersection of a vortex. Amidst swirling winds, pastors hang on to handfuls of hats — organizational leader in the morning, content creator over lunch, spiritual director in the afternoon. The pastor studies ancient texts and new techniques, stands on stages and sits beside hospital beds, leads long-timers and befriends outsiders, manages money and midwifes marriages.

Sometimes, the pressures or pains of this work are particularly acute. There are feelings of futility in the face of our cultural moment, critiques from the internet's armchair quarterbacks, and now and then, sneak-attack coffees with self-appointed inspectors for doctrinal purity. Ocassionally, a long-time parishioner leaves the church over a misunderstanding and doesn't say goodbye; inflation trends up and giving trends down for a third straight quarter; and whatever else may be in our minds or inboxes, Sunday is always only a few days away.

I read that last paragraph and it sounds like complaint. Honest to God, I don't mean it that way. I love being a pastor. I can't fathom much else that could be so rewarding and redemptive. She, the Church, is beautiful as ever, and it's a high honor to play a part in her stewardship and spreading. There is a reason we pastors keep returning to this work — it echoes a calling of love and vocation that sounds somewhere deep in our bones, like an earliest memory.

It is a deep gift to be a pastor.

Still, it must be said sometimes, if only to sustain sanity in the storm, being a pastor is hard.

Becoming a Pastor

Becoming a pastor, in the fullest sense of that word *pastor*, might be harder still.

An irony of this work is that having the title and role of pastor does little to foster, and at times seems to impede, actual pastoring. There is no shortage of confusion, distraction, and temptation around what it means to do this work in the context of the modern, mechanical church. One may even say a vocational crisis is afoot in most American congregations.

"I am misunderstood by most of the people who call me pastor," Eugene Peterson wrote. "Their misunderstandings are contagious, and I find myself misunderstanding: Who am I? What is my proper work?"[1]

Is a pastor someone who speaks devotionally or motivationally from stage each Sunday? The person guiding a church's vision, teams, and tasks? A caregiver, counselor, or thought-leader?

On any given week, we'll try our hand at most of those things. Yet at its essence, "pastor" is a vocation that runs and must be reclaimed far deeper than its many functions. There is a great need, it seems to me, to get at the "thing beneath the thing," the heart of this vocation that beats below the ribcage of ministry we often get stuck on.

Deep down, "pastor" remains a shepherding word. It conjures long journeys and shifting landscapes, company kept amidst mundane days, courageous and sometimes challenging care, guidance to the wayward, tending to the weak.

"Pastor" implies a quality of presence, a posture of proximity. It is a *with* kind of word, presuming practices both sacred and slow. Pastors work in the countryside, which is to say that much of the work happens when no one is looking. Pastoring means a life of

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[1] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 48.

subtle and sustained showing up, a life of ordinary and often-obscure faithfulness. It means walking alongside others, day after day, in search of the deepest of wells.

It is easy to lose track of this first-order work, easy to forget the native language of pastoring. For a while, we may not even notice when we have. Subtly, we find the focus of our efforts shifting from God-attentive discernment to self-made plans, from the actual people in our flock to the impersonal abstraction of church we're seeking to build. We find ourselves more invested in the story of our ministry than the stories of those we shepherd. We log long hours at desks until there's little time left for what happens at tables.

Of course we need to lead, to plan, to work hard. It is *how* and *why* we do those things, and what ends we are doing them for, that may or may not be pastoral. It is the impulse and imagination underneath our work that requires clarity. We need to get the sequence right — not viewing people as the means to form Christian ministries, but viewing our ministries as the means to form Christian people.

And so becoming a pastor means *un*-becoming a lot of other things that come more naturally and willingly to us. It entails *un*-learning much of what we have picked up along the way, even things that have proven successful.

It takes a long time to become this sort of pastor. It doesn't just happen. It is a quality carved out of us in the difficult days and wilderness years. It is a downward descent from high heights and bright lights, the fruit of a long formation that only comes on the far side of failure and forgiveness. It will involve our lives being restored and re-storied.

We'll find that Peter has something to teach us in all this.

Pastors on a Pilgrimage

This is a project for pastors being formed along that way. While some church leaders seem quite comfortable, firmly settled in the methods and motivations that undergird their work, others of us find it not so simple anymore.

Perhaps we take an honest look inside and must own up to the shrapnel of unbaptized ambitions and unconvincing answers we find, the persistence of insecurities, immaturities, and inconsistencies. Perhaps we look back to see long seasons where ministry didn't pan out how we dreamed it would. Now and then, the awe-inspiring message we share gazes back at us and seems boring or basic, a paper tiger of talk not power. For some, the theology we curated so carefully has begun to shift within (and without our consent), and what do you do with that when you're the theologian-in-residence, the one who is supposed to have all the answers? Other times, the practical methods of ministry we have been taught feel increasingly incongruent, like old wineskins liable to burst, in the light of our expanding experience, pain, and personhood.

Being a pastor means not only leading others on a great journey, but being connected to and in conversation with the one we are on ourselves. This seems obvious, but I've found it easy to lose sight of, particularly when my journey is moving at a pace or in a direction different than the people I am leading. Fixated on being faithful on the outside, we can wind up numb on the inside. Ultimately, faithfulness will require that we learn to lead with our souls on the move.

And so, to continue saying yes to the journey Jesus invites us on, there will be motivations to mature, disillusionments to befriend, old wounds to acknowledge, and new ways to walk. The pastoral life, then, is a pilgrimage — a sacred journey of our soul's transformation and imagination.

Like Peter, we must *keep* following Jesus, for we cannot guide others where we are unwilling to venture ourselves.

PART 1

Journey

STARTING LINES *for the* PASTORAL STORY

Path Toward Galilee. © Withyou Ministries. Used with permission.

Help me to journey

beyond the familiar and into the unknown.

Give me the faith to leave old ways and break

fresh ground with you.

Christ of the mysteries, I trust you.

ST. BRENDAN THE NAVIGATOR

Jesus' first words always seem the same: *Follow me!*

Taking him up on this will mean being led on a lifelong journey. It becomes clear quickly: The invitation to follow Jesus means something far richer than a one-time spiritual transaction or shift in religious affiliation. Rather, following Jesus is an invitation to profound transformation which God works through the settings and scenery of our ordinary lives. We keep company with Christ and are meaningfully changed along the way.

A quick scan of the Scriptures bears witness to this sort of transformational journey — it is the story of the Bible as a whole, and the story of countless individuals told in its pages. God calls and comes to ordinary people, makes promises to them and of them, works and walks with them, and over the long run apprentices them into God's own way of being in the world.

Without this journey, we simply can't become the people God desires us to be for others. Embarking and enduring on the journey, then, particularly for those of us who are pastors, is at the heart of a life well-lived.

We'll find it helpful to begin by establishing key concepts and common language. To that end, Part one paints several "starting lines" as a backdrop on which the heart of this project can be placed and explored in greater depth and dimension.

#1

Faultlines

FRACTURES IN THE PASTORAL VOCATION

Upon this rock

I will build my church.

MATTHEW 16:18

Beneath the surface of the American Church, fractures have formed. There are faultlines — imperfections and jagged gaps that have developed in our substrate and been tolerated too long.

Though difficult to detect, these faults are primary sources of the rupture and rubble we experience too often in contemporary church life. Headlines of pastoral scandal, tales of the fallout from unhealthy ministries, and statistics of rapidly declining church participation are well-documented in our time.[1]

Perhaps more insidious are the everyday divides we've grown so accustomed to that we now consider them benign. There are significant cultural, political, and theological chasms running between our churches. We can't help but note the malnourished spiritual formation and Christian imagination fostered in our congregations (even if Sunday services are filled with churchgoers). And pastors themselves seem to have become quite comfortable with subtle ways of going about the work of Jesus that are inherently at odds with the way of Jesus. These fissures splinter the fidelity of our following Christ — and the rubble is piling up.

There is, of course, tremendous good happening in and through countless churches. Christ, the cornerstone, is faithful to hold all things together and intends to establish his Kingdom on solid ground. Even so, it is clear that bedrock assumptions of the Western Church, particularly within evangelicalism and various church planting or growth movements, are proving unstable and require re-examination.[2]

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[1] Patrick Miller observed that in a recent year, 15 of the top the 20 articles published by a leading Christian news source centered on the failure of a church or pastor. "I like Christianity Today, but..." X (formerly Twitter), December 26, 2022, https://twitter.com/PatrickKMiller_/status/1607420024981188608.

[2] Though I have pastored across multiple denominations and traditions, each church I have served was planted within 20 years of the time I was involved and was influenced by assumptions of evangelical church plant culture. Given their stage, these churches often operated with underpinnings of youthful zeal and adolescent angst — a cocktail of big dreams, high energy, sincerity, and uncertainty. These are the contexts I love and have given my life to, and also the contexts within the modern Church I aim to critique.

Still, I must admit I find myself reticent to attempt diagnosis of what is unwell with the American Church, reluctant to chart the condition of its pastors. The Church has taken plenty of licks lately, and frankly, I don't want to pile on. Pastoral work is weighty and complex, and while critiquing the Church is easy, ways forward are harder to come by. This is just one reason I find Peter's journey so helpful — we'll find in him a positive vision for our pastoral future, an embodied example of how our ministries can imitate Jesus' way.

Divided Pastors

At the heart of this project is a call for healthier pastors because pastors are core to the rock on which Jesus builds his Church. Yet under sustained stress and unreasonable expectations, many in vocational ministry today find themselves working hard to hold their churches together, only to discover cracks emerging on the inside.

Exhaustion and depression are well-documented experiences among pastors. Eighty percent of ministers in a recent survey reported the work has negatively impacted their families, and seventy percent said they do not have a single close friend.[3] The pressure a pastor feels can seem unrelenting — mounting until the soul's relief valves shake and whistle — and so it is unsurprising to see pastors stumble into moral failure, find relief through toxic leadership, or walk away from the work altogether.

Henri Nouwen's words, written thirty-five years ago, feel more timely than ever:

> Ministers today increasingly perceive themselves as having very little impact. They are very busy, but they do not see much change. It seems that their efforts are fruitless. They face an ongoing decrease in church attendance and discover that psychologists, psychotherapists, marriage

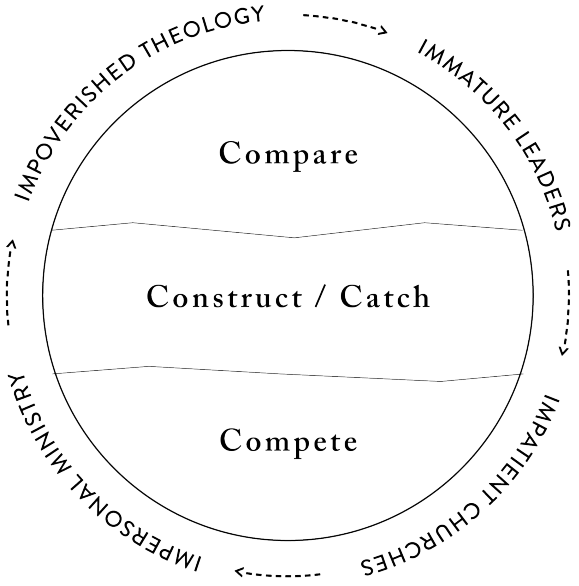
[3] Why do pastors keep others at arms' length? I read recently that, on average, a person will lose 5–7 significant relationships over the course of their life, while a pastor loses about that number each year. I don't know how precise those numbers are, but they resonate with my experience. Statistics from Thabiti Anyabwile, "Don't Make Your Pastor a Statistic", *The Gospel Coalition*, May 28, 2011, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/dont-make-your-pastor-a-statistic. and Brandon Cox, "Leadership Is so Messy", *Facebook*, October 11, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/bcoxreads/posts/pfbid027mxKPzK8zrPhNW3vqhGMSFHfjb34APWJEMn92jSpKk9gbCBr4xmruPTrgzKmdhU9l.

> counselors, and doctors are often more trusted than they… Meanwhile, there is little praise and much criticism in the church today, and who can live for long in such a climate without slipping into some type of depression?... Many begin to wonder why they should stay in the ministry.[4]

How did we get here? What forces are fracturing the pastoral vocation in our time, and how might those divides be mended?

Fractured Foundations

I observe at least four faultlines running below the modern Church that deserve exploration. These faults reinforce and ricochet off one another, and intersect at pivotal points to weaken the ground beneath our feet.



Impoverished Theology

Imagine you traveled back in time to any random date within the past thousand years. There's a good chance you'd arrive in an era without the internet, motorized vehicles, or perhaps even printed books. And this, too: Bragging rights for the tallest

[4] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 22.

building on earth, at whatever time you were visiting, would almost certainly belong to a church.

The "reign of cathedrals" lasted over six hundred years, stretching from the time of the Great Pyramid to the completion of the Washington Monument.[5] These magnificent houses of worship carry enduring legacies and can still be experienced in places like St. Paul's Cathedral, Notre-Dame, and St. Peter's Basilica. But stunning architecture and dazzling art aside, these towering structures point to a subtle but pervasive theology of *ascendancy*.[6]

For much of Christendom, it simply went without saying that the Church held preeminent rights to the highest place, the seat of honor and influence in any given culture. It seems we pine for those good old days still. We presume God desires our churches to always be at the "top-center" of things — that God's calling is always a greater calling, a path pointing upward. Our buildings look different now, but underneath the mission of many modern churches, large and small, an assumption of ascendency by divine right remains.

There is a positive impulse here — Jesus has called us to spread good news, to be salt and light, to build a church on solid rock. But if we aren't intentional, our desire for influence can lead to the conviction that our birthright is always *more* - whether the "more" be notoriety, size, or impact. Convinced we're called to shake the world, we move through it like bulldozers, appealing to blunt force to make things happen.

There is a pivotal moment in Peter's story on the Mount of Transfiguration. He assumes the way is always up, always permanent tabernacles of glory and light. But Jesus

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[5] Iman Ghosh, "A Visual Timeline of the Tallest Historical Structures," Visual Capitalist, August 28, 2019, https://www.visualcapitalist.com/a-visual-timeline-of-the-tallest-historical-structures/.

[6] By this we are not referring to the theologies about the ascension or participation in God's essence (theosis), which may use the language of ascent or ascendancy in a different sense.

leads Peter downward — into a path of descent that ends in cruciform service. Jesus' way of influence, we'll find, is surprisingly different from our own.

This over-inflated theology of ascendancy works in tandem with another malnourished theology — a soteriology of *personal conversion*. Tim Suttle argues that the modern Church has diminished the grand sweep of Jesus' Gospel to become almost exclusively about individual salvation rather than the restoration of all things Christ is accomplishing.[7] This emphasis on winning souls has led to a tragic reduction of Scripture's Story.

Again, there are things worth appreciating here. Jesus' good news does radically reshape our lives, catching us up into a "world without end" and giving us a message to share in the here and now. There's a problem, though: When the stakes feel this high — eternal life or not — we can rationalize almost anything. History teaches us that the ends of reaching people for Christ make it possible to justify almost any means, including ministry for Jesus that looks nothing like Jesus' way of doing ministry.

Taken together, these and other diluted doctrines birth disordered motivations in the daily round of pastoral work. Eventually, we find ourselves doing the right things for the wrong reasons and with the wrong goals in mind.

To be pastors in Jesus' way, we'll need to submit our lives to a more Christ-shaped theology, a change of thinking *(metanoia)* about how God leads and loves in the world.

Immature Leaders

Healthier views of God's way are a good first step, but we can't receive them without simultaneously learning a larger language for what is happening within ourselves.

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[7] Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 92.

Jesus calls each of his pastors into a profoundly transformative story, a deeper journey beyond our *false selves* and *first tasks*.

The false self is an immature expression of our core in Christ, a fearful and protective part of us.[8] It is not necessarily bad, but it is too young to call the shots wisely — so Jesus desires to grow us up. To the degree the false self is unexamined and unchecked, we will always feel unsafe and at stake, and our churches will be formed under the tyranny of comparison and competition.

Meanwhile, the first movement of our lives (a concept we'll apply to Peter's story later) is marked by an obsession with "first tasks," the early expressions of our life's work. As we mature, we tend to find these first tasks broken open, like the shell from an acorn, to reveal a deeper invitation within.

But for a while, usually until midlife and sometimes much later, we are animated by questions of identity, individualism, and exceptionalism. Driven to distinguish ourselves and dominate our world, we live with a vague sense of scatteredness. We construct towers (and we'd love for them to be the tallest on earth) to attach us to God, validate our worth, and cement our place in the world. In this sense, life's "first fire" — to apply imagery from Peter's story — burns like an ember of the ancient tale of Babel:

> "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we shall be scattered..."[9]

Looking around the modern church, we spot these sorts of tower-building projects going up everywhere. Sadly, ministry this way results in the very people we're called to pastor being reduced to pawns, mere brick-builders for the latest building

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[8] Robert Mulholland has described the false self as a pervasive structure that is characteristically fearful, defensive, possessive, protective, manipulative, indulgent, distinction-making, and destructive. See Robert Mulholland Jr, *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 30.
[9] Genesis 11:4.

campaign. Everyone, even God, could be a threat to the project, so we live with our heads on a swivel.

Or, to use another image, life's first task tends to revolve around catching what we think we don't yet have but need to be whole. We sense a deficiency inside, a lack of consummation and fulfillment, and look for ways to plug that hole with whatever we can get our hands on. Adam and Eve's instinct runs deep — we grasp for all we fear will not be given, looking to acquire enough to make our lives complete. Peter's first task, we'll find, centers around this desire to catch.

These three drives — *compare*, *compete*, and *construct/catch* — have been the fire fueling most of my life's ministry ambition. And no wonder. These impulses are undercurrents for how we teach young pastors, at least in certain spheres, to become effective Christian leaders. They are the unspoken premise below many best-selling books, pastoral conferences, and leadership podcasts. They are how our shining stars glimmer and cast bright light.

But for me, anyway, the effort to construct a towering ministry atop such shaky ground left me highly unsettled, reactive to every perceived tremor, always anxious to keep climbing. I spent decades building, but was rarely grounded, rarely at peace.

Impatient Churches

Immature leaders shape immature cultures, and soon, the system is infected. Competing and comparing pastors construct then catch competing and comparing churches. Soon, the tail is wagging the dog — the congregation has been formed to love and laud only that which appears externally effective or successful. Essential ministry postures like discernment, contentment, and patience are excised from the culture, and the slow work of God is never afforded space to breathe. Ironically, our drive for greater

production in the Church requires us to reject God's actual produce — the fruit of the Spirit that manifests in long-suffering, peace, and gentleness.

Impersonal Ministry

Soon, we need to microwave ministry. Things just don't pop quickly enough otherwise. We find ways to artificially inflate our size or influence. It is at this point that we begin to lose sight of the actual task of pastoral leadership, which was never to grow a church but to shepherd real people with personal names and stories.

When we assume God's will for our church is always *more*, we invariably manipulate the means of ministry. We bypass our natural limitations until we lose our grip on what church work is about. Recently, I read an article by a highly-regarded voice in church leadership. The expert described a strategy for how pastoral care could be done to rapidly expand a church's size. Clearly, the accent was not on the people themselves but on how they could be used in service of a larger plan.

The thing is, plans like this "work." Our churches will grow — but our people and Christian formation will not. Simon Chan summarizes our situation:

> [We do] not seek to turn sinners into saved individuals... rather, to turn disparate individuals into a worshiping community. The preoccupation of the modern church with numbers often misses the real goal of mission. Instead of turning out fine works of art, the modern church tends to model its mission on the mass-production factory… We then market the megachurch as the model of a successful church. Is it any wonder that grandiose strategies of winning the world for Christ have produced a bloated church whose ways and values are not very different from the world?[10]

While there are inherent challenges in pastoring large or rapidly growing churches, the problem is not ultimately one of church size. Instead, when a church of any size trades in relational presence for one-size-fits-all initiatives, or exchanges slow, organic formation for accelerated influence, ministry becomes impersonal.

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[10] Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 45.

Soon, the pastor finds themselves working as a program director, not a spiritual director.[11] We have enlarged the wineskin but spilled the wine.

Formation at the Fractures

Faultlines like these converge then compound. Geologists have a phrase for this sort of thing: An "overlap zone."[12]

Where multiple faults meet, reactions occur in which one divide amplifies and reinforces another. Immature leaders shape impatient churches, but then again, impatient churches produce, promote, and praise immature leadership. Impoverished theology births impersonal ministry, but impersonal ministry catechizes impoverished theology. And so on.

Much has been written on the distinction between attractional and missional models of church. While moving toward mission is a helpful corrective from the attractional model (which requires a church to be unendingly attractive and function like a side-show attraction), it skips a critical step. They differ on how to get there, but both attractional and missional churches still hold the assumption that God's immediate goal is to change society outside the church.

But God's first goal, it seems to me, is to change *us*. And so, to the landscape of missional and attractional models, I propose we prioritize formational churches. These churches are driven by Jesus into *descent*, downward into cruciform service, deep-down into the guts of our own lives. There, we are formed into Christlikeness, which, it turns out, is what actually influences others around us.

For the Church to change, its pastors must change. And so it starts with us.

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[11] Eugene Peterson first used this contrasting language while calling pastors to engage a shift in paradigm. Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 177.
[12] C. Childs, J. Watterson, and J. J. Walsh, "Fault Overlap Zones within Developing Normal Fault Systems," *Journal of the Geological Society* 152, no. 3 (May 1995): 535–49, https://doi.org/10.1144/gsjgs.152.3.0535.

To the extent pastors allow Jesus to form them, they can become who God made them to be for their people. Leaders led by healthier understandings of God grow healthier themselves. Their wholeness spills over into the culture of a community, creating the slow space needed for discerned vision and patient, personal ministry.

Sadly, the inverse seems just as evident and in evidence. To the extent a pastor resists following Jesus (even if continuing to do "Jesus work"), the faultlines open up at their feet, dividing their ministries and shattering hearts.

It is essential that pastors view their cooperation with God's journey of transformation in their lives as first-order work. Continuing to follow Jesus on the deeper journey may well be the difference between pastors who "pass the peace" or pass the pain.

It is to that deeper journey then, that we turn our attention.

 # 2

Shorelines & Storylines

BELOVEDNESS / WILDERNESS / WHOLENESS

'We live mainly by forms and patterns...

If the forms are bad, we live badly.'

Stories invite us into a world other than ourselves,

and if they are good and true stories,

a world larger than ourselves.

EUGENE PETERSON

(QUOTING WALLACE STEGNER)

Shorelines

Peter's story with Jesus starts and ends on a shoreline. That's fitting.

Shorelines are thin spaces that divide one reality from another. To walk on a shoreline is to be in-between things. It is a threshold through which we cross from one way of being to another. *Shoreline* will be our term for the major turning points in a life.

We all have shoreline experiences — seasons or moments where we must and then finally do experience change in a profound way. Experiencing this sort of genuine transformation (or *conversion*) is one of the great graces and stewardships of life.

When we speak of conversion, we should of course include its theological sense, what we often call "salvation." But while we may be inclined to think of conversion as a single experience, Peter's story suggests otherwise:

> What about Peter? When was he converted?... Is it in Mark 8, when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah? Or is it in John 21, when after denying Jesus, Peter gets back on the journey of faith? Or is it in Acts 2, when he receives the empowerment of the Holy Spirit? Or is it in Acts 10—11, when Peter realizes finally that the gospel is for all? Here's the answer: Yes. Peter responded over and over to fresh illuminations of the gospel, and one can say for Peter — and for nearly every Christian who has ever lived that conversion is a lifelong process and journey.[1]

Peter's journey makes it clear: Each life in pursuit of Jesus will be invited then guided through critical thresholds, seasons of *metanoia* (a deep change of heart or mind) that transform who and how we are in the world. Before continuing, it may be helpful to pause and consider the major shorelines of your life, or those you sense may lie ahead.

Deeper and Deeper Into the World

North of the Canadian mainland lies the Arctic Archipelago, a one-thousand-mile expanse of mostly uninhabited, tundra-like terrain. Thirty-six thousand islands make

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[1] Scot McKnight, *It Takes a Church to Baptize: What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018), 27.

up this band, polka dots atop a vast stretch of sea ice. It is a place that has captured the imagination of explorers all the way back to the 15th century. At stake, they suspected, was a fresh link between Europe and Asia, a Northwest Passage that would revolutionize trade. The prize was up for grabs for any who could weave a way through the islands — and live to tell it.

William Baffin was one of many navigators attempting to unlock that elusive waterway. In 1616, he came upon a hulking strip of land rising from the glacial waters. He had unwittingly found one of the largest islands in the world. Today, it is his namesake — Baffin Island. Though larger in land mass than Spain, only thirteen-thousand people call Baffin home. Its more populous inhabitants — polar bear, caribou, and arctic fox — wander ice-slick glaciers on a landscape susceptible to snow any time of the year.[2]

Baffin Island has been the backdrop of films and lore of books. But it wasn't until 2019 that the island's most peculiar feature was discovered. Aided by Google Maps and a keen eye, a researcher found what is believed to be the world's largest third-order island. There, in Nettling Lake, is a shoreline surrounded by waters inside a shoreline surrounded by waters inside a shoreline surrounded by waters. Or, perhaps just as mind-bending, an island that is on an island that is on an island.[3]

Frozen solid most of the year, it's hard to say if anyone has ever set foot on this anomaly of geography. But if they had, they would have journeyed — from the outside in — across three separate shorelines to get to the real center of things. Standing on the innermost island, they would still be standing on the outermost island. They would be

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[2] Aaron Spray, "Baffin Island: What It's Famous For & How To Visit This Frozen Land" The Travel, August 11, 2022, https://www.thetravel.com/how-to-visit-baffin-island/.
[3] Josh Calder, "A New Largest Island on an Island on an Island," *World Island Info*, September 24, 2019, https://worldislandinfo.com/blog/index.php/2019/09/24/a-new-largest-island-on-an-island-on-an-island/. See "An Island in a Lake on an Island in a Lake on an Island," *Atlas Obscura*, August 2, 2016, http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/subsubsub-island-on-victoria-island.

simultaneously at land and sea, having been drawn into new and deeper territory without abandoning all that came before.

This, I suspect, is a picture of the sort of journey Jesus leads every pastor on.

Mary Oliver provides the language:

> One day, you finally knew what you had to do, and began...
> and there was a new voice... that kept you company as you strode
> deeper and deeper into the world.[4]

We are always being invited deeper and deeper into the world, deeper into the real work of our lives, deep-down toward the "thing within the thing" that the our calling to ministry is all about.

As we say yes to Jesus' invitation, we are formed through the following itself, shaped into Christ's image as he guides us through each shoreline. We are being drawn inland, nearer to the epicenter of God's gravity, the crux of all things, the eternal heartbeat of a cruciform Shepherd on which the world's foundation was set.[5]

Storylines

Among other reasons, I am captivated by Peter's unique story precisely because it isn't that unique. Peter's story, we'll find, is *the* story — a spin on what is simply true of all great journeys. Considered in isolation, the work Jesus accomplishes in Peter's life is creative and compelling. But if we bring Peter into conversation with the timeless patterns of how spiritual formation occurs, we find that stories like his run deeper than mere history or biography, things that happened "back then." Rather, Peter's life is a signpost pointing to redemptive storylines still at work today, storylines of transformation we can get in on.

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[4] Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 49.
[5] See Revelation 13:8.

Entering Peter's life, we find our own. We too have callings to live up to and into, dark waters to walk on, denials to confess. We too cry out for a redemptive tomorrow, a rescued story, a more meaningful ministry. And then we hope that what Jesus did for Peter, he can do for us.

It's how we trust the Word still has beautiful stories to write.

So, before we can draw deep meaning from Peter's narrative, we need to consider how his is a version of the metanarrative of redemption God has encoded into all things, a unique example of what is always true — and we hope, will prove true in our lives.

Mapping the Spiritual Journey

Many have endeavored to map the spiritual journey of transformation. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, for example, has been called "cartography of the soul."[6] Others, such as John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*, Søren Kiekegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*, and more recently Hagberg and Guelich's *The Critical Journey* make unique observations on how we are formed over the course of our lives.[7]

It is beyond the scope of this project to consider each of these frameworks comprehensively. Suffice it to say that if we were to place them side-by-side, we'd quickly notice themes and throughlines. Put simply, life with God follows predictable patterns and progresses through stages that have been attested to across age, tradition, and culture.[8]

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[6] Chuck DeGroat, *Wild Country of the Heart*, directed Andrew Nelson (Andrew Nelson, 2022).
[7] Many more examples could be cited, such as St. Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises or St. Benedict's contribution of a "rule of life." More recent examples include James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, Paul Ricœeur's *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Evelyn Underhill's *Practical Mysticism*, Allister McGrath's *The Journey,* Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*, Elizabeth O'Connor's *Journey Inward, Journey Outward,* Robert Mulholland's *The Deeper Journey*, and M. Scott Peck's *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace.*
[8] While our focus will be on Peter's life, it is important to note that the classic spiritual journey of historically privileged groups follows a different pattern than that of historically marginalized groups. For example, the typical masculine journey involves a "falling apart" experience that pushes the individual appropriately downward into dependency (Joseph's pit and imprisonment or Saul's fall from his horse into blindness are scriptural examples). The typical feminine journey, on the other hand, involves a "raising up" experience that lifts the individual appropriately into her dignity (Miriam's Song or Mary's Magnificat come to mind). My own personal journey — which will supply background material for this project — features elements of both patterns, which reminds us that every story is a unique adaptation of the paradigmatic storyline.

Several patterns for transformation will prove particularly helpful for our purposes. First, the *Two Halves of Life* paradigm, which divides the spiritual journey into two distinct hemispheres that are animated by different maturities and motivations.[9] In Peter's case, the two movements of his life are punctuated by moments around a fire, so we'll call them Peter's "first fire" and "second fire." Each fire is fueled by a particular metaphor Jesus gives Peter for that season of his life — first, a fisher; second, a shepherd. Jesus himself observes two distinct seasons of Peter's life: *"When you were young,"* and, *"when you grow old."*[10]

Second, my own schematic will provide a scaffolding for Peter's journey. All God's stories, I propose, are led along a storyline of *belovedness* / *wilderness* / *wholeness,* and are marked by pivotal redemptive experiences we'll call *forgiveness* (though that word should be thought of broadly). Let's consider each so we can notice them in Peter's life.

The Storyline: Belovedness / Wilderness / Wholeness

Belovedness (First Words)

God's stories always begin with a blessing. The opening words of Scripture are something like invocation mixed with incantation — *let there be light!* This is the genesis word that brings all journeys to birth. God's heart of Love overflows to speak a benediction and awaken a life (or even a world). Once awake and alighted, that life sets out to follow. The pattern seems downright liturgical: God *calls*, that which is called makes a *response*.

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[9] The "two halves of life" concept was first proposed by Carl Jung and more recently popularized by Richard Rohr (particularly in *Falling Upward)*, among others. See Carl Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2014), 60. See also Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2013).
[10] John 21:18.

The Scriptural pattern appears clear: Belovedness gets first dibs on all God makes. At their deepest core, God's creatures are not depraved or debased but delighted in, sparked afire with the inextinguishable flame of the Imago Dei. In Scripture, these first words of blessing are almost always packaged with a sense of chosenness, a calling or covenant, which will require the one who is called to follow God into an unknown future and live differently in the light of such belovedness.[11]

Wilderness (Lesser Words)

We might expect that such a blessed beginning would lead straight to the promised land. But always, the wilderness comes first. Delivered with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, God's chosen family was not led directly to Canaan, nor even along an expedient route. Rather, "God led the people on the wilderness road."[12]

Soon they were surviving on manna, which literally means "what is it?" In the wilderness, we eat our questions, and even God's provision is confounding. In the wilderness, our appetites are exposed — all the places we hunger for things other than every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Or consider Jesus. Having just drunk in the affirmation of his Father in baptismal waters, Jesus was led straight into the wilderness. There, surrounded by holy angels and howling animals, God's child was tempted to live from lesser words than the ones just spoken over him.

The takeaway of these two paradigmatic stories in the Bible seems clear: There is no getting around the wilderness part of our journey with God.[13] Along the wilderness

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[11] We see this pattern in the people of Israel at large, and specifically in the narratives of Abram, Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, Samuel, David, Esther, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, and Timothy, among a great host of others.
[12] Exodus 13:17-18 (MSG).
[13] It is important to note that we find ourselves in the wilderness through no fault of our own. Perhaps we are suffering an injustice that drove us into the desert, or possibly, as it was for Jesus, it was God who led us there.

way, all that was blessed in the beginning is broken open in a confounding crucible of transformation. This second phase of the journey is a far country of profound disorientation, temptation, and bewilderment.[14] We find ourselves far from the Father's house, stumbling in slop and often unsure how we even got here.

The Slashes of Forgiveness

In the *belovedness* / *wilderness* / *wholeness* storyline, not only are the words significant, but the slashes between them. These slashes represent shorelines between each stage, thresholds that must be crossed if we are to continue following Jesus.

There are places in our journey of tremendous suffering and stuckness. Hagberg and Guelich call this "the wall."[15] For John of the Cross, it was the "dark night of the soul." Whatever words we use, these profoundly painful seasons cannot be skipped or sped through. Here, we're going to have to wait awhile.

A critical feature of these seasons (and we'll see this clearly in Peter's story) is that some significant part of the breakthrough must be *done unto us*. If we had the resources, willpower, or wisdom to pass through the wilderness wall ourselves, we would have done so a long time ago. Yet the territory preceding deep conversion seems a blockade to us. We keep running up against the limits of what we know and have become reliant on, sometimes for long seasons and amidst significant suffering.

In the most etymological sense, we need *forgiveness* — the fulcrum on which the entire spiritual life swings. This does not necessarily mean forgiveness from sin (though that may be desperately needed). Even broader, something must be *given-for* us that we cannot attain or give to ourselves. God seems to wait until our options run out, until we

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[14] Notice the etymological similarities in "*wilderness*" and "*bewilderment*."
[15] Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem: Sheffield Publishing, 2011), 113.

have exhausted our last survival strategy, until our frantic efforts fail us. God waits until we arrive at the ragged edge of ourselves, that we might finally *be converted*.

At last, we realize something has changed in the very places we could not change. New postures emerge which could not have been accessed or appreciated before. We find ourselves living from a new wellspring, a surprisingly renovated interior place, not quite sure how or when the shoreline was crossed. This much is clear in retrospect — it wasn't through our effort or earning. Rather, new life was given-for us.

Wholeness (Last Words)

The pastoral life is birthed in belovedness, wanders through wilderness, turns on forgiveness, and culminates in wholeness. Wholeness — what Scripture calls *shalom* — is the increasing appropriation and actualization of the belovedness spoken from the start. All that has been shattered by wilderness or faultline is now rearranged in healing arrays, and integrated into a wholeness we could not imagine before.

Wholeness means something deeper than the erasing of pain or easing of difficulty — it is better news than mere retreat to Eden.[16] Rather, God's way of making things whole involves even what was torn being brought into the tapestry of redemption.[17]

In God's story, the cross is needed as well as the empty tomb, and we learn to hold them together.

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[16] Wholeness means *we* have changed, even if the circumstances of our lives have not. Sometimes the chronic pain goes on, sometimes the relationship remains estranged, sometimes the illness returns. But how we inhabit those circumstances is deeply different.

[17] The cross is the chief example of how the worst parts of the story are made into raw materials for redemption. This brings to mind the Japanese art of Kintsugi, where a broken dish or pot is placed into a master artisan's hands. Rather than eliminate the cracks, the artist mends them with strong lacquer, then surprisingly accentuates them with gold dust so that which was broken becomes most resilient, beautiful, and valuable. In the end, the art continues to honor its full story, and it is in this sense that it has been made whole.

The Paschal Mystery

Ultimately, we are bearing witness to the Paschal Mystery, a theological pattern that means something like "mysterious passage." The Paschal Mystery sees Jesus' journey through *life*, *suffering*, *death*, and *resurrection* as normative for every Christian.[18] The pattern is attested to in endless array.

LIFE	CHANGE / SUFFERING / DEATH	NEW LIFE
Creation	Fall / Sin / Law	New Creation
Summer	Autumn / Winter	Spring
Garden (Eden)	Garden (Gethsemane)	Gardener / City
Home	Exile / Far Country	Homecoming
Palm Sunday	Maundy Thursday / Good Friday / Holy Saturday	Easter Sunday

If the Paschal Mystery is true, we have a story we can hold to when disorienting or difficult seasons come to us — it's what we said yes to when we took Jesus up on his invitation to follow.[19]

Our expectations for life set us up to see suffering as an aberration or invasion — interruption, not invitation. But, if we see our lives as patterned by and belonging to a great Story, we are assured that even the wild and dark parts of this journey are in fact normal and may be needed. Though we are adrift and up to our neck in spits of deep, dark water, we have not been lost at sea.

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[18] In any area where spiritual formation is taking place, we might expect to find a "miniature" version of this pattern playing out. Thus, W. Paul Jones says, "history as the big picture is acted and reenacted within each creature." W. Paul Jones, *A Season in the Desert: Making Time Holy* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2000), 205. Some of the patterns in the table below are also observed in Jones' work).
[19] Walter Brueggemann has argued that this Paschal rhythm — seen most clearly in the Triduum — is also the structure of the Psalms, and points to a wider pattern for understanding the spiritual journey. "Our life of faith," he says, "consists in moving with God in terms of: (a) being securely oriented; (b) being painfully disoriented; and (c) being surprisingly reoriented." See Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms, Second Edition: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene: Cascade, 2007), 16.

The journey that God begins, God will also see through. As we keep following Jesus, we'll find that storm-tossed seasons ultimately serve to throw us onto a good and safe shore. The final word, Julian of Norwich testifies, is *all shall be well.*[20]

Entering a Ministry of Death and Resurrection

All this has profound ramifications on the pastoral vocation. The pastor, while being led on their own journey of following Jesus, stands beneath constellations of other life, death, and resurrection stories. In such a tender and holy space, the pastor is entrusted with the most power to either reveal or deface God in community.

So while a lifelong journey of transformation into the likeness of Jesus is essential for all Christ-followers, the importance and implications of that journey are unique for pastors. If we will not follow Jesus deeper and deeper into his way of being (which necessarily involves change, pain, and surrender of lesser ministry motivations), we will set up shop in the wilderness, crafting churches of golden calves and calling them worship.

Winn Collier's words are a summary of all we've discussed in Part One, and sound a call for pastors to continue following Jesus:

> When we stand before our people, we do not stand first as leader or minister, but as one beloved in the heart of God. If we haven't heard the voice telling us we are beloved, if we haven't allowed the death and resurrection realities of our baptism to be our truest story, we will exert immense energy trying to get someone or something else to tell us our belovedness, and the wilderness will ravage us. Pastoral ministry untethered from the Father, Son, and Spirit submerging us in our belovedness, and disconnected from the belovedness of those who call us 'pastor' will inevitably become manipulative, competitive, self-serving, or dehumanizing. It gets entirely disconnected from God. At this point, at least in ways the really matter, we are no longer pastors.[21]

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[20] St. Julian (of Norwich), *Revelations of Divine Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 174.
[21] This is my best recollection of the words spoken by Winn Collier in a class lecture at Western Seminary, January 9, 2023.

PART 2

Transformation

PETER *and the* PASTOR'S JOURNEY

Galilee at Dawn. © Withyou Ministries. Used with permission.

The cadence of the Paschal Mystery beats deeply in the Eucharist and its mystery of faith.

Christ has died,

Christ is Risen,

Christ will come again.

Every time a pastor celebrates at the table, we repeat the announcement that God:

blesses,

breaks,

gives.

In the mystery of faith, somehow the breaking makes things whole.

As it is for the bread, so it is for our lives and churches.

And so it is for Peter.

In just three short years with Jesus, he is led along an astounding and archetypal journey that reorients his understanding of God, ministry, and himself.

We'll find his story rich with implications for our own lives and ministries. We, after all, are strange combinations of obedience and obstinance too.

Peter's life,

beloved /

wild /

whole /

paints a living picture of how our former ways of being (fishers) are becoming pastoral (shepherds).

Movement #1

The First Fire

PASTORAL CALL & CRUCIBLE

Sunrise at Galilee. © Withyou Ministries. Used with permission.

Until now, my work has been fishing.
The long, lonely night yielded
less than I'd dreamed, less than I care
to admit, and the new day found me
tending nets, not fish.

Jesus entered the scene
of my minding my own business
and told me he needed a vessel.
I assumed he meant my boat.

'Push into deep waters,' he said, 'try again.'
Perhaps he hadn't noticed the empty nets I was tending.
Perhaps the water needed to be deep
for reasons I was yet to understand.

My story starts on this shoreline.
Twice.

A SUNRISE AT SEA

 # 3

Invitation

WHAT JESUS SEES IN PETER (THE CALLED FISHER)

They pulled their boats up on the beach,

left them, nets and all,

and followed.

LUKE 5:11

On an ordinary day, I took an ordinary walk. Summertime was tardy that year, still in the act of arriving, and the air was cloudless and crisp. Blue hues stretched the sky every way but West, where the Front Range stood — its red rock still capped in snow. It was picturesque, but since it almost always is in Colorado, I hadn't much noticed. It was the summer before high school's senior year, and I was meandering unclaimed woods behind the apartment my family had just moved into.

The season of transition before me was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. So, walking, I asked the big questions of God everyone seemed so eager to ask of me:

"What's next after high school?"

"What will you study in college?"

"Are you even going to college?"

I'm not sure why I was talking to God about any of this — I didn't yet have any practice or language for prayer. But there I was, sifting through a mixed bag of possibilities and apathies, trying to discern what was next. I hadn't found anything important enough to give myself to yet, and I sure didn't feel ready for all life was pushing me toward. So I prayed, speaking aloud what I noticed within.

Then, without so much as asking permission, a voice spoke back.

If you follow my commands, I will bless you.

I looked around. No one. Hesitantly, I responded, "What?"

The words came again. Was a voice from the ether audibly addressing me? Was I hallucinating, or conjuring it? Twenty years later, I'm still not sure what exactly happened, but that moment arrested me with all the force you'd imagine when words fall from the vast Western sky.

God, it seemed, was calling.

My theological mind, now older and gentler, wants to quibble with the words I heard. From where I sit today, I'd be more comfortable if what had been spoken was simply, "If you follow me, I'll be with you," or something like that. The *quid pro quo* of this offer, not to mention its emphasis on command-following, seems to me now an immature rendering of how God would speak if God were speaking.

But perhaps those were the only sort of words my adolescent heart could metabolize, words sharp enough to split my slumber and set me on a path. Perhaps the whole scene was Pentecostal — God descending from alpine skies to speak wonders in a language I could understand.

Whatever the case, those were the words spoken, no doubt about it. I know for sure because they roll through my mind even now — like a memory, but more.

What Jesus Sees in Peter

Jesus, too, was out for an ordinary walk. We aren't told what the day was like, but ambling the pebbled shores of the Galilee must have been pleasant enough. There was a phrase in those days: "God made seven seas, but Galilee was his delight."[1]

The sun was rising as fishing boats pulled in from the long night's toil. The fishers all seemed ragged and despairing, but no one else seemed upset. I imagine children washing in the water, giggling as the ebbing tide rippled and lapped their legs. I imagine the coast was dotted with locals offering prayers and hopes and hellos for a new day. I imagine Jesus took these sorts of walks just to take in creation, just to talk with his Father.

He came upon a handful of fishers scrubbing heavy, braided nets. Here we meet Peter, his little brother Andrew, and James and John — business partners, maybe.

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[1] Hill and Hill, *The First Breakfast*, 10.

Jesus stopped walking. He paused to take a long look at them — long enough for the crowd (which had already begun to take interest in him) to close in, long enough for the fishers to realize his gaze was set square in their direction. For Peter, this would be just the first time he would see this stranger on the shore and intuit him to be a needed friend.

The way Jesus stared at Peter, though at first strange and unsettling, would become something of a motif between them. There was a tender intensity to Jesus' gaze, a dogged discernment. The Johannine word of choice to describe how Jesus looked at Peter is *emblépō*. It hearkens the idea of seeing not only with the eyes but with the mind, less a seeing toward and more a seeing through. This particular word will return only two other times in Peter's narrative: Once when the servant girl studies him to detect if he is a disciple, and again moments later when Peter — having just denied Jesus around the high priest's campfire — turns to find Jesus *emblépō-ing* him.[2]

Right from the start, it is clear there is something Jesus sees in Peter that Peter does not yet see in himself.[3] I wonder if this particular gaze of Jesus functions in Peter's life as the *belovedness* word, a reminder that Peter is seen and safe in the heart of God. It becomes shorthand in their relationship, like an unspoken code and grounding force to root Peter in a reality larger than his own abilities and liabilities. *Emblépō* sheds light on the non-verbal communication Jesus and Peter shared around that fire of denial. At his lowest moment, when the wilderness way was all Peter could see, there were Christ's eyes seeing him through.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

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[2] Michael Card, *A Fragile Stone: The Emotional Life of Simon Peter* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 14.
[3] This idea finds further development in Hill and Hill, *The First Breakfast,* 18.

The First Shoreline

For now, Jesus was moving in closer to the fishermen for a conversation at the water's edge. It's unlikely this was the first time Peter met Jesus, though it's hard to say for sure as each Gospel tells the story differently. Either way, this encounter became Peter's first shoreline, an experience of awakening intercepting the otherwise mundane morning.

God, it seems, was calling.

And without so much as asking permission, Jesus steps into Peter's rowboat and tells him to aim the boat into deeper waters. The scene is basically preposterous: Jesus (a carpenter from agrarian Nazareth) gives Peter (an accomplished fisher from seaside Galilee) instructions on how to fish. It's hard to blame Peter for the exasperation in his reply: "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing."[4]

Fishing was hard work, done in the dark at the mercy of the elements. Both Peter and Jesus would eventually have life-threatening encounters on these waters. There were no easy nights out there. So, of course, Peter — bone-weary from fighting the tide all night and irritated for having nothing to show for it — is incredulous.

But then again, there was that gaze.

"Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets," he adds.

The haul of fish that immediately follows has rightly been called miraculous. It was a bonanza, a boon, a blue-collar fisherman's golden ticket. Yet this windfall catch plays almost like background noise in the storytelling. The focus remains on Peter, dealing first with the urgent matter of ensuring his boat won't sink, then looking inward. For reasons that aren't yet entirely clear, this whole scene has undone him. This much is evident: He feels *seen* by Jesus, and it both fulfills and frightens him.

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[4] Luke 5:5. See also Hill and Hill, *The First Breakfast*, 22.

A friend of mine, a counselor, says that when we feel exposed, our instinct is to gouge everyone's eyes out before they can see. Perhaps this makes some sense of Peter's strange cry when he finally climbs ashore: "Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man!"[5]

But Jesus sees beneath Peter's shame.

Later, they'll have developed enough rapport that words won't be needed, just a glance will suffice. But this time, Christ says his favorite phrase aloud: *"Don't be afraid."*[6]

An Invitation to Journey

I wonder if Jesus paused here. His next words would be significant. Did he wait for Peter's breathing to slow, his mind to settle? He gave his invitation: *"From now on, you will be fishing for people. Follow me."*[7]

And this was a thunderclap — an epiphany call for Peter of affirmation and orientation. The one who had begun to see all the way through his heart was now inviting him into a journey and new work — still fishing, but different. On Galilee's shoreline, Peter is called to ministry.

At the end of his life, he may want to quibble with the words he heard. Over the long run, Peter will receive further invitations from Jesus that will more deeply frame what it means to minister. But for now, fishing words make sense; fishing words will do.

Perhaps these were the only sort of words his heart was able to metabolize, anyway.[8] Perhaps they were Pentecostal — God inviting Peter into wonders using the seafaring language he could understand.

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[5] Luke 5:8.
[6] Luke 5:10.
[7] Luke 5:10, (MSG).
[8] Hill and Hill employ the missiological concept of "heart language" to consider Jesus' use of fishing words with Peter. *The First Breakfast,* 22

Peter's Example for Pastors: *Awakening & Invitation*

Most pastors I've met respond to the idea of being called into ministry with something like, *who me?* It's difficult to believe we have what it takes for work of such significance. Still, Peter's story makes it clear that Jesus has an uncanny way of seeing things in us long before we see them in ourselves.

Sometimes I ask how much my sense of call was really from God and how much was my own invention. In more frustrated moments, I question if calling is really a thing at all. I search for evidence of it — reaffirmation or reassurance, a breakthrough of inner confidence, a comfortable word.

But now I wonder if the clarity of God's call in our lives isn't best seen backwards, in looking behind at the curvature of our stories. There was, back then, a version of my life peeling off in a quite different direction. I was deeply fearful, far from peace, tossed on storms of disquiet. Bending neurotically inward, I was uneasy with my existence, unsure of any real belonging in the world. Nails bit down to the ragged edge. This went on a long time.

Then, one day, unbidden, the call of God. An awakening, slow like a sunrise.[9] There were moments of piercing dawn, but more often, a soft and stubborn glow on the far horizon telling promises of another day.

Fits and starts, for sure. But, twenty years later, I wonder how I got here: A sense of purpose and vocation; work to do in this world that comes to me in grace and wideness; a chance to speak better words over the storm-tossed still offshore. Somehow, in ways beyond any earning or knowing, I was drawn here — called by God.

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[9] *Awakening* is the traditional word for the first portion of the Christian journey. In his book *Invitation to a Journey*, Robert Mulholland describes the classical Christian journey in stages of *awakening*, *purgation*, *illumination*, and ultimately, *union*. See Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 95.

For all of us, and Peter, the road ahead will include many mistakes and much maturing. But, squinting into the sunrise, we find ourselves waking up on the rim of a new life as God's cooperative partner.

Our journey has begun.

#4

Commission

PETER, WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG

I'm telling you the very truth now:

When you were young, you were able to do as you liked;

you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go.

JESUS, TO PETER

When you were young, you were learning life word by word.

Now, you are beginning

to see the poem.

LAURA CLAWSON

Growing into a calling requires a meaningful shift in how we understand God and ourselves. So, it's no surprise that narratives of calling in Scripture almost always involve a new name being spoken over the one who is called. Abram, Sarai, Jacob, and Saul are several examples of how new invitations come packaged with new identities. This happens with Peter, too, likely several days before their encounter on the Galilaean shore.

John, the lone Gospel writer to tell the story, has it this way: Peter (though in this story he is still Simon) is dragged by his little brother to meet Jesus. Andrew is quickly becoming convinced that this Jesus may be the long-awaited Messiah. The two arrive at the house, but before a word can be said, Jesus sees and sizes up Simon: *"You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)."*[1]

"Simon" was the single most run-of-the-mill name of that time and place — as common as a name could be. "Peter" was unknown as a name throughout history until this moment.[2]

So, Jesus proclaims over an ordinary person something entirely new. Petros, a rock, Jesus says he *will* be called.

But not yet.

Maybe Peter has some living to do before the name will fully suit him. Or perhaps Jesus pronounced this less as a name proper and more as a mold to shape Simon, like water running over his rock-life to slowly form him into something new.

In any case, having just said, "You will be called Peter," Jesus proceeds, strangely, to nearly never call him that again. Throughout their three-year relationship, Peter is almost always "Simon" to Jesus. Years later — but only on the far side failure and forgiveness —

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[1] John 1:42.
[2] Card, *A Fragile Stone*, 28.

Peter will live into his new name. Post-Pentecost, it seems to slip the early Church's mind that he was ever a Simon. For the remainder of the New Testament, he is Peter.

The Adolescent In-Between

In just a few short days, Peter has been called three ways: Called into a new name, called to follow Jesus as a disciple, and called to the work of ministry. And he gets off the blocks with all the ardor of a new convert, an enthusiastic devotee. Having been surprisingly caught up in a passion and Person who makes new sense of his world, Peter wants the rest of the world to get caught up in it, too. Having been radically commissioned, he determines he will also be radically committed — even to the end.

But Peter doesn't realize he's only beginning. He's still *young* — an adolescent at best in spiritual maturity and ministry leadership. Jesus has quickly drawn Peter into deep waters, and to his credit, Peter doesn't hesitate to jump in.

Thing is, he has no idea how to swim in waters like these. So he will need to be rescued a time or two; he'll have to thrash around in the shallows as he learns and unlearns how all this works.

I imagine most pastors can relate. I don't know anyone who gets into this work feeling prepared or particularly qualified for it. Rather, somewhere along the way, we say yes to our own three-fold invitation and take a leap, making up our minds to follow Jesus and lead others to do the same. We figure the rest out while trying to stay afloat.

Pastoring then, seems to require a season of vocational adolescence. We know Jesus is calling us into a new name, but we're not quite ready to be called *by* that name.

We are in-between things: Growing, but not grown-up; older, but not yet an elder. It is a season filled with passion, but lacking perspective; a season of energy in want of

maturity. We'll have to live a while in that space Frederick Buechner says lies between innocence and experience.[3] We simply don't know how much we don't know.

The First Naïveté

Each morning my bedside clock sounded the 4 a.m. summons to prayer. Only a handful of months had passed since I heard God on that Colorado trail, and it birthed in me a burning for more. So every morning I staggered out of bed, filled a cup with equal parts sugar, milk, and coffee, and hit play on a mixtape of worship songs. Pacing the bedroom, I would pray.

In those early days, it felt necessary — as if I were spiritually bound to it — to get in at least two hours of prayer each morning. After all, I had been called by God, and that's no small thing. Plus, I was getting a hunch this invitation was not merely to follow Jesus personally but to lead others in that following as well. This would require extraordinary effort, I told myself.

All my adolescence, anxiety, and ambition were in play as I wore grooves in the carpet, calling to God through the popcorn ceiling as if the heavens were miles away. The whole scene might have been legalistic, even laughable, were it not so genuine. Each day, I brought all my youthful vigor to the room. Each day, God brought eternal constancy and kindness. We met over coffee, and I learned to hear the rhythm of Jesus' heart.

But sometimes, it comes back to me, and I break out in hot flashes of embarrasment still. That time when, having prayed like this for several months, I was asked to preach to a room filled with grandparents. I was nineteen.

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[3] Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 7.

With all the hand-wringing in the world, I chastised them for allowing "so-called maturity" to quench their passion for Jesus. I knew they weren't up at 4 a.m. praying like I was, so I concluded they were phoning in the spiritual life.

I had no idea what I was talking about. I hadn't suffered yet. Following Jesus seemed so easy because it hadn't been contested, hadn't yet cost anything. I was still *young*. The congregants were gracious, but I could see in their eyes they knew something I didn't.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur coined the phrase "the first naïveté." Walter Brueggemann, reflecting on Ricoeur's work, describes it:

> The first naïveté is the precritical. It believes everything, indeed too much. It is an enjoyment of well-being but unaware of oppression and incongruity. It is a glad reception of community but unaware of hurt. It can afford to be uncritical because everything makes sense. But growth — and indeed life — means moving to criticism.[4]

There will be another naïveté, a second simplicity that comes only after we have been "through the pit."[5] In the long run, we can be brought back to wonder, but by then we will know how to carry our wounds alongside it.

Talking Big

Peter shoots his mouth off for the first bit, too:

Even if everyone else stumbles... I'll never!

I won't deny you!

You will never wash my feet!

I will lay down my life for you![6]

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[4] Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 169.
[5] Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets,* 169.
[6] Matthew 26:33, Mark 14:29, John 13:8, John 13:37.

Mere moments after Jesus affirms Peter's ministry call in Matthew 16, Peter assumes that affirmation has qualified him to rebuke Jesus for speaking about the cross: *"God forbid it, Lord!"*

In the face of such cocksureness, Jesus aims the sternest words he'll ever have for Peter: *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*[7]

What else can we set our minds on when we are young?

The early stages of the pastoral journey are marked by sincere devotion, heartfelt effort, and engaged commitment as we champion our newfound priorities. We kick-start programs, serve passionately, and grow like weeds. The strength of this early part of following Jesus is its innocence and insistence. Like Peter, we get shot out of the cannon into a new name and life, fire-powered and sure we are fireproof. We just haven't walked through any fires yet.

And so there is a certain sincerity, both lovely and dangerous, to ministry's early expressions. Nearsighted, we see only the edges of things but are sure we've seen it all. Inexperienced, we think we have every experience with God figured out. Impulsive, we imprison everyone in earshot — even Christ if need be! — to the confines of our current sense of orthodoxy or obedience. A scroll through social media is all it takes to see this stage of ministry leadership on full display.

Peter's Example for Pastors: *Ministry in the First Fire*

Jesus makes a fascinating distinction about Peter's life:

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[7] Matthew 16:23.

> 'I'm telling you the very truth now: When you were young, you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old, you'll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don't want to go.'[8]

At the risk of oversimplifying, the classic spiritual journey can be separated into two major movements. Like many of us, Peter was fired into ministry while he was still "young" — in that period of formation described earlier as the first half of life.

In life's first half, words of wilderness talk louder than words of belovedness. We are simply not convinced that we can really relax, that Jesus understands what is best for his own story, or that God can be trusted as the foundation and fountainhead of ministry.

This is the first fire of ministry, and to the extent we are sparked by it, these young questions and assumptions form the paradigm for all we do — including good and godly things like pastoring. Ministry under the glow of this fire may speak much of God, but it tends in practice to be fueled almost entirely by human strengths, strategies, and values. In short, we are still striving, still self-reliant.

With significant effort, we build our lives and ministries with whatever raw materials we have — charisma, beauty, humor, hard work. But deep down, there is an unsettling sense that the whole thing is only as stable as what it was established on. So we live under tremendous pressure to *keep* being charismatic, *stay* beautiful, crack another joke, work another late night. We churn, week after week. How else will this Sunday's sermon be better than last Sunday's? It is exhausting.

One church I pastored had a favorite song, "It's All About Jesus." But looking back, I must admit the years there were deeply motivated by my need to validate my worth and earn a verdict for myself. I was following Jesus but still wanted to go wherever

[8] John 21:8, (MSG).

I wished, and the tools I trusted for the job were my own ambition and effort. I used them indiscriminately, and it basically worked.

But while I was blazing trails externally, on the inside I was hunkered down, craving security and clarity. It's no wonder the early stages of faith are invariably drawn to theological systems and leadership models that maximize certainty and ensure control.

We learn from Peter that what starts as earnest devotion can grow domineering, and what is birthed as a commission to be *used* by God for others can devolve into a demanding to *use* God and others.

We should not, and cannot, skip this part of our story. But we can learn from Peter. His impulsivity and volatility regularly pushed him outside the pace and priorities of Jesus. In time, Peter will learn that fires must be tended, lest everyone get burned. Practices of discernment and detachment help to channel the blaze within into a healthy and life-giving energy. It's just that when we are young, those postures seem like a waste of time. While we grow, we do well to surround ourselves with older voices. We'll need a larger wisdom to counteract the self-referenced striving that sparks us at ministry's first fire.

The Gift of Youth

In the chapter ahead, we'll explore how undiscerned ambition can propel our ministry into hurtful places. But, it should be said at the outset that youthful ambition is not all bad. Sitting here, reflecting on those early days of ministry, I see that ambition may well have been the driver that helped make tracks out of the dark recesses of my story, piloting me into a brighter day. It helped me step into another version of myself that was just emerging — a version with something to say, a role to play, a place to stand.

Certainly some of my adolescent ministry was feigned or forced, a wearing of names I had read about but hadn't found within. Still, there was a new name I *had* been called, and I needed to live into it somehow. So those early days of declaring myself a leader, stepping into a pastoral role, and declaring confidently what I had learned just days before — all of this belonged as part of God's work to forge a calling in my life.

Untamed ambition is an expression of adolescence, but adolescence is required to grow up well. We have to try out our engine, overstate and then understate our contribution, complicate too much then simplify too much. It's how we learn to respond to God's invitation, how we affirm that perhaps Jesus was right about what he saw in us. Among other things, ambition is a bold pronouncement that somewhere, deep down, we believe God can be trusted.

I laugh at myself sometimes, poking fun at the ways I showed up in the early days of ministry. But also, the glow of that first fire was holy ground on the journey — the place where a burning bush taught me God's name, and in it, I heard echoes of my own.

#5

Ambition

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

I confused a sense of purpose

with grabbing the future by the throat;

while the museum of my memories was just some blurry photographs.

TAYLOR GOLDSMITH

I tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock

I will build my church,

and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

JESUS, TO PETER

In a small room — no, more like a storage closet — my pastoral career began.

I had officially been on the church payroll a few days, hired to become the latest in a long line of exiled youth pastors. My predecessor, like the one before him, had just been deemed unfit for service and summarily shipped off. Overlooking the pattern, I took this to be my chance. With all the confidence a nineteen-year-old could conjure, I raised my hand and offered my mostly blank résumé. A lamb to the slaughter.

The church's second-in-command poked his head into my still-undecorated office. "Come talk with me a minute," he said, motioning into the hallway. We walked fifty paces or so, past the auditorium where I was to give my very first sermon hours later. Then he stopped at an oversized supply closet — an odd place for a staff meeting it seemed to me — and slid open the paint-scraped maroon and metal door. We walked inside.

Since he too had only been in his position a handful of months, and since he had come with a mostly blank ministry résumé of his own, I figured I was in for some last-minute guidance or perhaps an encouraging prayer.

"Are you ready for tonight's service?" he asked.

Hesitantly, I mustered, "I think so."

"Good," he said, looking down at me. "Because if things don't go well tonight, your head is going to roll."

Even then, his words struck a dissonant chord in me. How could the belovedness I heard as Jesus' word be congruent with this way of doing Jesus' work?

Is this how church is behind the scenes, I wondered?

I nodded, deflated but determined to prove my mettle. Bearing down, I prayed and preached and produced.

I must have done alright — I had the job another two years.

New Names / Old Stories

Looking back, it's easy to shrug off that conversation from decades ago. This pastor's pep talk, so misdirected and malaligned with the way of Jesus, is a burden I let go of a long time ago. Or, at least, one I shoved into my own storage closet.

But now, as I survey the pastoral life, I wonder if this boss from my past merely said out loud what is always being whispered in the fearful places:

Am I enough for this leadership life, this pastoral call?

Are my doubts, denials, and deficiencies disqualifying?

Will my church — or worse yet, my God — find me wanting, and my head will roll?

For Peter, being called into ministry was a strange tonic — a mixture of surprise and shame. And I think something like that is true for all of us. I learned quickly that a new name doesn't automatically displace old stories. And though I didn't know it at the time, that small supply closet was the shoreline where my ministry life slipped from belovedness into wilderness. I was going to have to prove myself from here on out.

Becoming a pastor surfaced all sorts of dormant internal stories, both good and bad. I remembered gladly how naturally leadership came when I was young, bossing the neighborhood kids around and making plans to one day be President. But I also began to viscerally recall an early childhood nightmare — that I would be abandoned, left to drown on a dark and violent sea. Ministry was making me face the fact that along life's way I had come to view myself as fundamentally sub-human, one who could serve others at the feast but never have my own seat there. All of this and more formed my unique subterranean narrative, the story I told myself alongside Jesus' new story.

I suspect every pastor carries their own combination of wild hopes and deep wounds into ministry. Chuck Degroat reminds us that "to the extent we ignore our vast inner sea with all its diversity and complexity, we inflict our dividedness on others."[1]

To pastor for the long run, we'll need to grow in awareness of all we bring with us — our bewildering histories, triggers and traumas, survival plans, and sincere dreams for an impactful life.

Into the Wilderness

All stories birthed in belovedness must eventually be worked out in the harsher context of the wilderness. Advent and Epiphany eventually yield to Lent. The innocence and clarity we started with is soon enough challenged, and lesser words are whispered in our ears, counter-narratives to God's benediction:

Fend for yourself — you are not safe.

Stay impressive — you are at stake.

Power will protect you — you need control.

It's not hard to see how a pastoral life loses its way in this arid terrain.

The Pastor and Persona

Other than their first meeting, there is only one time Jesus refers to Simon as Peter. After clearly naming who Jesus is — *"You are the Christ!"* — Jesus echoes by naming who Simon is becoming — *"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."*

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[1] Chuck DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness: Busyness, Exhaustion, and Healing the Divided Self* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 60.

Because his new name is directly tied to pastoral leadership, Peter might be forgiven for making the same mistake we often do — taking Jesus' part of the work and assuming it to be our own.

Before long, Peter is striving, vigilant to build the Church however he can. He steps to the forefront of the muddled cohort following Christ and leads with intensity and impulsivity. He is bright and brash, obviously gifted, charismatic, and somehow both under and over-confident. But if nothing else, he is sincere, a growing leader doing his best to honor Jesus. Soon it's hard to find a single story about the disciples in which Peter is not centerstage.

Beneath Peter's leadership persona (literally, *mask*), however, stagecraft and shadow are shaping the work. While his rocket ascent to leadership must have been impressive to outside observers, Jesus could see that growing in Peter were both wheat and weeds. Below Peter's brave face, a reckoning was coming.

"*Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you.*"[2]

I Will Build *My* Church

When I talk with other pastors, it seems most of us carry stories that eventually need to be sifted out. Below them is a core lie about pastoral work — that *I* must build *my* church. All too often, we forget who promised to build the Church and whose Church it is in the first place.

In our best attempts to lead for Jesus, we quickly find ourselves holding and doing far more than Jesus ever intended. The yoke feels heavy, but we grit our teeth and double-down. Externally, we are training our congregations to value and applaud our constant church-building fueled by ever-increasing levels of activity and reactivity. Internally, we

[2] Luke 22:31.

are exhausted, though the applause feels nice. Accolades feed our inner weeds, which grow larger and choke the ground. The cycle repeats.

Not long ago, I sat down to make a list of the messages I had received about what makes a great pastor, the kind Jesus could build a ministry on.

Message #1: Good pastors grow measurably successful churches.

"Anything healthy will grow," my pastor-mentor told me as we counted the weekly worship attendance. And this seemed true enough. I only realized later that unhealthy things, like cancer, grow too. And also, healthy things eventually become full-grown and must stop growing to remain healthy.

Months later, I received an email from him. It had been sent to the entire staff. "Check your life for sin," he wrote. The reason? For the first month ever, our church's attendance hadn't increased. The logical extension of our ecclesiology was clear: Something was wrong with us if the church wasn't numerically growing.

Message #2: Impact and affirmation come through over-functioning.

I was told early on that ministry was spelled *w-o-r-k*. Soon after, I heard a famous pastor teach that "tiredness is not criteria to function." Whatever that means, I made it my mantra. I began experimenting and found that the harder I efforted — more meetings, longer hours, less rest — the more I was affirmed. I caught the fever and made this my strategy, encouraging others to do the same. I called it leadership. I couldn't see that I had signed up for the literal definition of over-functioning. My wounded heart was desperate to matter, desperate to make a difference, so I learned to tell my body and emotions to pipe down. I developed severe chronic pain two years later, and couldn't figure out why.

Message #3: Image and appearance matter more than integrity or authenticity.

"Only communicate things you've conquered" was the advice my friend was given as a young pastor. The ministry was growing and momentum was building, so why burst the bubble that promises a life of faith is one of non-stop victory? Over time though, he internalized a message that the appearance of holiness mattered more than actual holiness. Effectively, he had been asked to be a brand ambassador, not a pastor. But on the inside, he wanted to be honest.

How many of us believe our job is to maintain our congregants' certainty about faith, or reinforce their buy-in to our church? We labor to rally troops, defend positions, eliminate mysteries, and export doubts. But it feels like pushing a boulder uphill.

Message #4: You need to change the whole world.

Flipping through a magazine, I came upon a quote:

> Every golden era in human history proceeds from the devotion and righteous passion of some single individual... There are no bona fide mass movements; it just looks that way... There is always one man who knows God and knows where He is going.[3]

I memorized it immediately, adding a finishing touch: "*And I will be that man*."

Later, I read 2 Chronicles 16:9:

> The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

"And I will be that man," I told anyone who would listen.

What I hadn't yet read was Rich Mullins' wisdom: "If your life is motivated by your ambition to leave a legacy, what you'll probably leave as legacy is ambition."[4]

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[3] Richard Ellsworth Day, *Filled! With the Spirit: A Book of Devotions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1938).
[4] Quoted in Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 37. See also *Pursuit of a Legacy*, directed by Steve Taylor and Ben Pearson (Reunion Records, 2003).

I was so convinced I had to be God's man I forgot I was God's child. Now I wonder how much my ambition to build my church was, deep down, actually a desire to know my connection with God and my community was secure.

Alongside God's call, I think what drew me into pastoring was a desire to make a difference for everyone, all the time. Perhaps, I hoped, making that dent would notch out a place for me in this big story, a spot at humanity's table to sit. So, when I saw my pastoral presence was making an impact, I soared. But what of the times my efforts to make a difference are received with *indifference* — am I scattered then? Will my head roll?

I had slowly bought the lie that God would only be pleased with the extraordinary. So, when church life felt ordinary, I became anxious. These sorts of unrealistic expectations in ministry inevitably breed burnout and despair. When we think our ministry must or will sweep entire cities like tidal waves, we extend ourselves beyond our limits. We end up depleted, then blindsided by the letdown of emptier nets than we'd imagined. I know several pastors who built beautiful, small communities but later left ministry discontent. I wonder how much their burnout was precipitated by unrealistic expectations of mass impact? Henri Nouwen's reflections hit home:

> You could say that many of us feel like failed tightrope walkers who discovered that we did not have the power to draw thousands of people, that we could not make many conversions, that we did not have the talents to create beautiful liturgies, that we were not as popular... as we had hoped, and that we were not as able to respond to the needs of our people as we had expected. But most of us still feel that, ideally, we should have been able to do it all and do it successfully.[5]

Message #5: Your job is to keep the church happy and on the hook.

Eugene Peterson has famously argued that "the pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers."

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[5] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 34.

> The shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeepers' 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.[6]

I had heard that what you catch someone with, you must keep them with. So, I assumed my job this week was to offer a better sermon or more life-changing pastoral visit than last week. When that pressure became debilitating, I grew resentful toward the church but didn't know how to name it. Years later, I am learning that health and sustainability in this work means there will be moments the church affirms me and moments it is disenchanted with me; moments of honor and humbling; relationships in which I am appreciated and others where I am misunderstood; seasons in the limelight and times that light feels strangely lonely. I am learning no one has necessarily failed when my congregation is disappointed in my humanity, and I am disappointed in theirs. It turns out if there is no "man of God" in the room, everyone's eyes are drawn to God.

Peter's Example for Pastors: *Our Ministry Motivations Matter*

In all this, it should be repeated: Hard work is healthy; making a difference is good; ambition can be honorable; participating in Christ's work to build the Church is obedient.

Ministry efforts like these are rendered healthy or unhealthy based on the motivations beneath them. Our concern is not ambition but unbaptized ambition; not growth but undiscerned growth; not power but non-cruciform power.

As Peter found, Jesus can lead us into more whole ways of doing our work. We just need to *keep* following him.

But to continue following Jesus, we'll need to reckon with our own inner reality. The good news is that even the accuser's plans to sift our divided hearts can become,

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[6] Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.

through Jesus' prayers for us, redemptive invitations. The damage we sow and disappointments we reap through lesser expressions of ministry can become crucibles for transformation.

If we're willing to name them honestly, our disordered ministry desires, misplaced expectations, and immature pastoral plans are clues hinting in the direction of wholeness. Even the devil's temptations in the wilderness can point us to the very places we believe less than Jesus promises. The chaff is exposed, and we can plumb for the wheat beneath. We are being led into greater pastoral fidelity and stewardship.

 # 6

Confrontation

DESCENT & (SELF) DENIAL

If the pastor is the polished gem in the middle of the parish,

the people will be distracted and blinded by his brightness.

Rather let him be as a common rock, simple and plain.

And his people will see the woundrous sky.

WILLIAM C. MARTIN

Following Jesus is a constant, renewed 'leaving everything.'

It is never finished and continually requires a fresh commitment...

[Peter] left everything right at the start, without hesitation,

but he still had to confront the claims made on his freedom by Jesus.

DOM MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI

Vast parts of our life and leadership must be redefined in the light of Jesus. But perhaps no topic is more crucial, or more complex, than the issue of power. As Christian leaders, the way we steward power is the clearest tell of whether or not we truly want to follow Jesus.

Unredeemed power (and its sidekicks control, celebrity, and authority) is at the heart of the desert's temptations. At times, toxic power in the church goes incognito, wearing the disguise of benign words like leadership, influence, or mission.

We know all about the havoc power can wreak on church leadership. Its abuses and excesses are displayed in bold-print headlines. It is the reason countless people no longer feel safe in what Jesus called his Father's house. I don't know anyone who does this work very long without crashing into the rocks of power's shadow-side. All too often, we pastors are the perpetrators.

A New Sort of Leadership

Along the way, there are suggestions that things aren't working with Peter's default approach to leadership. An early hint is found in the first miraculous catch of fish. Peter is given the haul of a lifetime, but his nets begin to break before he can bring it in.[1] Now that Jesus has called Peter to be a fisher, he will need to grow in wholeheartedness, so the catch of souls Jesus brings to him won't be lost through the gaps of his brokenness.

It has been proposed that Peter wasn't merely an employee in the fishing business but was actually manager of it.[2] If true, Peter was already accustomed to some degree of power before Jesus called him. This prior experience would prove helpful to Peter at first, as he already knew some of what it meant to lead. Yet ultimately, Peter's past experience

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[1] Luke 5:6.
[2] Graham Houston, *Leading by Example: Peter's Way for the Church Today* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008), 11.

would prove to be an obstacle for him, because Jesus desired him to lead in a whole new way.

Peter gets started in ministry the same way any of us would. He gathers his hard-earned résumé, credentialed skills, and prior experiences, then brings them to bear on his new vocation. He's happy to do Jesus' work, and assumes the way he's done all his other work will hold up here. But Jesus is going to woo Peter into realizing that all he knows must change. You simply can't fish for people in the way you fish for fish. So even Peter's first calling will require his unlearning and the humility to receive a new imagination.

The Work of Jesus in the Way of Jesus

If I have one wholesale critique of the modern Church, it's this: We seem determined to do the *work* of Jesus apart from the *way* Jesus taught us to do it. We want Jesus' ends without his means. This, Christ assures us, will not bear fruit.

The problem is not new. For a time, Peter was sure he could pave a path to glory that would bypass the cross. He expected, as I often do, that the pastoral life would be a sequence of successes. He dreamed of an up-and-to-the-right ministry, a bigger buildings and budgets ministry, a right-by-might ministry.

Jesus has just assured Peter that he will be instrumental in building the Church. But before that conversation can even end, a tug-of-war breaks out between the two over the ways and means of that church-building. Jesus foretells his impending suffering in Jerusalem, which will lead to death. And Peter is defiant: "This shall never happen to you!"[3]

But Jesus rebukes Peter. For him, the cross is both integral and inescapable:

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[3] Matthew 16:22.

> If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to safe his life will lose it.[4]

Jesus' words are weighty enough. But he doesn't just say these things — he concocts a plan for Peter, a sequence of events to shed light on how power works in this Kingdom. Each scene is set against the backdrop of a particular flickering light, precursors of the two fires that will forever shape Peter's life.

Brilliant Light (The Transfiguration)

Jesus' plan begins on a high mountain six days later. Eugene Peterson provides the background:

> There are sixteen chapters in [Mark]. For the first eight chapters Jesus is alive, strolling unhurriedly... and then... just as the momentum of life, life, and more life is at its crest, he starts talking about death. The last eight chapters of the Gospel are dominated by death talk... He heads straight for Jerusalem… Three times in successive chapters Jesus says explicitly: He is going to suffer and be killed and rise again.[5]

Punctuating this dramatic shift is a singular event, the Transfiguration. The story-arc of Peter's life matches the tangible, geological shape of Mount Tabor.[6] The mountain itself forms a triangle with two slopes, one upward and one downward. The key question: Will following Jesus prove to be a path of ascent or descent? Or, as Peter suggests, perhaps they can craft a tabernacle atop the heights (he does know how to build a church, after all) to avoid the difficulty altogether.

The Transfiguration is the continental divide of both Jesus' and Peter's lives. Each trailside step makes rock-solid the difference between divine and human things. It makes the Kingdom-way concrete. "Petros" is learning a new form of power as he walks across another rock.

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[4] Matthew 16:24-25.
[5] Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 187.
[6] Though Mount Tabor is traditional, scholars debate if Mt. Hermon or another "high mountain" was the site of the Transfiguration.

And then, on the mountaintop, a brilliant light and booming voice: *This is my Son… listen to him!* When the shock wears off, Peter opens his eyes and sees that all his old heroes, all his revered ministry mentors, every other leadership way is gone.[7]

Only Jesus remains.

But he sees this, too: In the dazzling light of Christ, it is possible to be profoundly transformed.

Peter, so used to the fluorescent limelight of human ambition, is rendered speechless. "Just as well," Jesus basically says. "It's best to not speak about this anyway until you understand death and resurrection."

The Initial Descent

Just after this event, two of Peter's colleagues petition Jesus for places of power. They hope to sit on his right and left in glory. It's one of the few times James and John appear in the narrative without Peter alongside. All three witnessed the Transfiguration, but Peter was not asking for power this time. Perhaps he was still mulling over all he just saw. Jesus responds to the disciples:

> You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority... But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.[8]

The lesson of how Christlike power operates sinks in further. Peter must have meditated on it deeply because years later, he would teach early Church to lead using this same sentiment.[9]

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[7] I first heard this interpretation of the Transfiguration through Brian Zahnd. See Brian Zahnd, "Jesus Is What God Has To Say," Brian Zahnd (blog), February 12, 2015, https://brianzahnd.com/2015/02/jesus-god-say/.
[8] Mark 10:42-43.
[9] In 1 Peter 5:2-3, he writes "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock."

Days later, Jesus leads his band of followers into Jerusalem. While Pontius Pilate enters the city atop a warhorse through the front gate, Jesus enters the city atop a donkey's baby through the rear gate.[10]

Before Peter's eyes, the contrast plays out: Two Kingdoms, two ways, two approaches to power — each headed for the Temple. Peter will have to choose which way belongs there.

Candlelight (The Last Supper)

All this was rattling in his mind as he entered the upper room. With the cross just ahead, this final meal seems to have held a final leadership lesson for Peter.

Michael Card observes that, based on cultural practices and Peter's primacy amongst the disciples, we would expect to find him and John seated next to Jesus — on Jesus' left and right. John, we find, is indeed seated close enough to whisper to Jesus. Peter, it seems, is not.[11]

On this night, it appears Peter has not been given the traditional place of honor. Why? We can't say for sure, but Card posits Peter was assigned a servant's role for the evening.[12] If true, Peter's role would be to wait on his colleagues, to wipe the table with a damp towel in hand, to be the servant of all.

But he would not be the only one. To drive the lesson home, Jesus removed himself from the head of the table as well. Taking up a towel, he embodied one more time his way of being in the world.

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[10] For more, see Chris McNeal, "War Horses," May 26, 2018, https://themcneal.com/tag/war-horses/.
[11] When Peter wants to understand which disciple Jesus thought would betray the group, his only option is to motion from afar for John to ask Jesus. See Card, *A Fragile Stone,* 82.
[12] Card, *A Fragile Stone,* 82.

Torch Light (The Garden)

Walking to Gethsemane, all these things were welling up inside Peter. Jesus heads into the garden's mist, and Peter is left to take stock of things. These three years with Jesus had become, for him, both affirmation and confrontation.

He already knew Jesus was the life and truth — he said as much when he made his famous Messianic affirmation.[13] But now, years into his ministry, a new question takes shape around whether or not Jesus really is the *way*.

Peter trusts Jesus, but has a lot of faith invested in his old ways, too. The very strategies that have brought him so far are now confronted, and something tells Peter the walls are closing in.

Jesus returns to where he had left the disciples, asking them to stay alert and pray. He makes the request three separate times.[14] Each time, the disciples fall back asleep. They are exhausted, but also confused as to what is happening. The air feels thick, and sleep promises a temporary escape.

But the hour is at hand, and Peter is soon startled awake by the noise of clinking armor and oncoming soldiers, a garrison of guards entering Gethsemane.

Under threat, our old ways tend to spring back like muscle memory. Survival mode kicks in — fight or flight. Instinctually, Peter unsheathes his sword. It's difficult to blame him for acting like a cornered animal in this moment. The church he had worked for years to build is crashing down around him. Peter is only sure of one person he can count on, one way to stay safe. He grabs his sword and cuts off Malchus' ear.[15]

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[13] See Matthew 16:16.
[14] This is just the first example of Peter being repeatedly asked the same thing — the sequence of a three-fold request will play out two more times in pivotal moments of the days ahead.
[15] John 18:10.

"Put your sword away," Jesus says, as if to ask his church leaders why they have swords out in a garden of prayer in the first place. Re-attaching Malchus' ear, he says: *"Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?"*[16]

One last time, Jesus points his followers toward descent and self-denial.

But this is all too much for Peter. He collapses toward a different denial instead.

Firelight (The Denial)

Peter stumbles into the high priest's courtyard — tired, confused, and cold. But at least he's there. The other disciples have fled entirely.[17] Though he doesn't know it, Peter will mark the rest of his timeline against the events at this first fire. Here begins death and resurrection, for Jesus and Peter.

Unsure what else to do, Peter tries to blend in. He warms himself fireside, and for a moment, his heart rate slows. He begins to breathe again. But the reprieve is brief. A servant-girl sees him and is sure it's not the first time. "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth," she says. So here it is — decision time for Peter. Will it be the way up or down? Survival or surrender?

The intensity of the moment must have been molten hot — a super-heated fire, a charcoal crucible. Peter lays down his sword. But only to pick up his shield.

"I do not know the man."[18]

Peter's Example for Pastors: ***Confronted by Jesus***

Jesus calls pastors to walk a path of unlearning, descent, service, prayer, and ultimately, sacrificial suffering. If I'm honest, this feels like more than I knew I had signed

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[16] John 18:11.
[17] Matthew 26:56b.
[18] Matthew 26:71-72.

up for, more than I often feel capable of. Asked to stay awake to the central work of prayer, it seems much easier to carry on with sword-swinging and survival strategies.

To walk the halls of Jesus' school of leadership is to see everything we knew brought into fresh light. As we keep following Jesus, things we believed or even ministry heroes we admired may be displaced — transfigured by Christ. We find ourselves invited, more and more, to let go of our bona fides, our seats of honor, our reputations, our certainties about where the story is going. It's all a bit threatening. After all, our sense of call, not to mention our livelihood, depends on staying the course.

The work we do requires that we lead with steady certainty. We are called on to pray confidently for those in pain; we are charged to see a vision and chart a course, never mind the fog and shadowland; we are asked to speak eloquently and plainly about unsearchable mysteries like love, truth, and eternity. But sometimes, when day is done and we finally slow down, the rumbling within gets loud. Sometimes the confessions we lead seem trite in the face of our own deficiencies. Sometimes the assurances we pronounce feel insufficient to absolve our denials. We carry our own questions with us, and the answers we've been giving all day to others fail to address them. In times like these, the call to follow Jesus comes fast, quicker than we feel we can keep up with.

How often have I made Peter's mistakes? How quickly I settle for lesser forms of security, feeling cornered and wielding whatever weapons I find at my side. When I am afraid I find it easier to speak half truths, but they end up wounding people. I feel embarrased and run backwards to safer stories, berating myself the whole way.

This portion of Peter's story shows how deep our former ways run, how desperate we are not to die.

But in the end, everyone gets hurt.

 # 7

Reversion

REGRET & (SELF) REJECTION

I had a dream last night, I dreamt that I was swimming

and the stars up above, directionless and drifting

somewhere in the dark, were the Sirens and the thunder

and around me as I swam, the drifters who'd gone under

I had a dream last night, and rusting far below me

battered hulls and broken hardships, Leviathan and lonely

I was thirsty so I drank, and though it was saltwater

there was something about the way it tasted so familiar

I had a dream last night — but when I opened my eyes

your shoulderblade, your spine, were shorelines in the moonlight

new worlds for the weary, new lands for the living

I can make it if I try —

I closed my eyes and kept on swimming.

JOSH RITTER

Just like that, Peter descends into what must have been a hell of shame and regret. Three times, the question comes, "Are you one of his followers?"

Three times, Peter denies it.

But the dam had already broken after the first denial. He starts to spiral, becoming more bombastic with each repudiation. By the time the scene is over, he is calling curses on himself to prove how honest his deception is.

The rooster crows suddenly, splitting open the night. Peter wheels around to hear where the noise came from. And there, he sees Jesus looking him square in the face from across the courtyard. He's looking through him, not at him. *Emblépō*.

Peter has seen this knowing look before, and it always seems to break him in two. "He went outside and wept bitterly."[1]

Self-Rejection

Several parts of Peter were in play at the first fire. His behavior is impulsive, which is true to his character. But his behavior is faithless and fear-driven, which is not. Amy Montanez reflects on the scene:

> When we act in ways that seem hard to understand, we must look deep within and be completely honest with ourselves... What was I feeling that was so overwhelming that I could not deal with it any other way? Until we can take responsibility for what was happening inside of us, we usually cannot forgive ourselves.[2]

Montanez points us down the right road because, ultimately, Peter's work will be to make peace with himself. Jesus already knew how to see beneath the floorboards of Peter's shame. Peter, for now, does not.

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[1] Luke 22:60-62.
[2] Amy Sander Montanez, "A Good Friday Meditation: Could Peter Forgive Himself?," Building Faith (blog), March 25, 2016, https://buildfaith.org/could-peter-forgive-himself/.

Vows

Sometimes, in our more devoted or desperate moments, we make vows instead of commitments. Usually, they are either vows to be faithful or vows to never feel a particular pain again.

A while ago, I unwittingly caused pain to someone on my church leadership team. I apologized and felt empathy, but the level to which the situation stung me seemed disproportionate. I was *too* upset by what had happened. I lost sleep and spent days wondering about it. Finally, I realized I was so devastated because I had unwittingly broken one of my ministry vows. I had sworn my church leadership would never hurt someone the way others had hurt me. I had made a vow, unspoken but iron-clad, that there was simply no way to keep over the long run.

Peter had vowed never to deny Jesus, but here he is, having done just that. What started as swearing something ended with cursing himself. There was no getting around the gravity of his denial. Perhaps his mind returned to what Jesus had told him not long before: "Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."[3] This was serious business, requiring serious wrestling.

The Inner Deep

The next few days pound Peter with questions:

Did I ever really follow Jesus at all?

Why am I always so damn foolish?

Could there really be a story better than self-reliance and self-rejection?

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[3] Matthew 10:33.

Of all the temptations Peter has faced, this temptation to curse himself, to see himself as a hopeless case, was what sent him into a tailspin. His vague and blurry fears grew suddenly sharp edges, a precise bitterness.

So, while Jesus prepared to plunge into Hades — so must Peter. *Follow me*, he hears, like a haunting on his insides.

Surely, the wilderness was dangerous enough, he must have thought. But now, to follow the Good Shepherd into the shadow of death would not feel safe, to let the Spirit lead into the world's underbelly would not feel sane. Hadn't he already descended low enough?

Not long ago, Peter's theology told him to set up shop on the highest heights. He assumed he'd find God there. But now he is at the far edge of his life, and the journey calls him to descend his own depths, to explore the far edges of the map where only sea monsters lurk. There was no going back to the lovely innocence and ministry algebra he had mastered in years past. It would be a wilder world to navigate from here on out, the stars and moon hidden, the sun going strangely black over Golgotha.

The only way out was down.

Disappearance

The story hangs unresolved as Peter disappears from the narrative. He's not there for the trial before Pontius Pilate, the long walk to the cross, or Christ's last words. The figure at the center of so many gospel stories is strikingly absent from the most emblematic ones of all.

Where has Peter gone?

Each Gospel tells the events of the next few days differently.[4] There are gaps in the narrative that can't be cleanly pieced together. What did Peter know and when? Putting all the stories together, the best we can ascertain is he was left in limbo, living awhile with shreds of ragged hope, residual regret, and lingering doubt in play. Peter seems to be hoping himself back into the story, then fearfully pulling himself out of it. This much is clear: These few days have taken a tremendous toll.

Reversion

The next time we hear of Peter in the text, he is back on a boat fishing. Six disciples come out with him, a picture of community that hasn't given up on him.

We first notice Peter is naked in the story, "stripped for work."[5] Perhaps this was merely practical, but it seems to me that everyone who follows Jesus (and then fails at it) eventually finds themselves stripped to the point where little is left. The allusion to Genesis 3 is clear — nakedness has to do with shame, and Peter is ashamed.

Perhaps that's why he's gone fishing, also. Under traumatic stress or significant distress, humans tend to revert to safer times and places. Psychological regression is a defensive strategy, a survival mechanism. It's a way of getting safe after the world falls apart, an escape to thumbsucking or Mom and Dad's cozy bed. For adults, it manifests in retreating to behavior from a prior developmental stage, a time before things went wrong.[6]

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[4] In Matthew, the disciples are told they will see Jesus again in Galilee. In Mark (presumably written under Peter's personal guidance and recollection), the faithful women are told by an angel that Christ had risen and that they were to tell the disciples — *and Peter* — that he would see them in Galilee. Remarkably, this indicates that Peter did not see himself any longer as counted in the order of disciples, yet Jesus was seeking him out by name. In Luke and John, we have stories of Peter running to the tomb himself, but neither time is he assured that Jesus was alive. Additionally, in 1 Corinthians 15, likely written before the Gospels, Paul reports an additional mysterious appearance of Jesus to Peter that came before any of the other disciples were aware of the resurrection (this is also referenced in Luke 24:34). Paul is likely repeating a narrative that has been passed down through the early church, though it is not clear what the contents of Peter's encounter with Jesus were, or if it was a dream or actual event.

[5] John 21:7.

[6] "Regression | Psychology Today," accessed November 9, 2023, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/regression.

Peter, clutching fig leaves and fishing nets, has returned to the waters.

Three years have passed, but here he is again, shame-struck by all Jesus has seen. It's all coming full circle. There, floating in the wake of Galilee, Peter has no idea that the most critical shoreline of his life was just ahead.

Peter has disappeared, but Christ has died. Peter has hidden, but Christ has been to hell and back. Peter is on the run, but Christ is on the rise.

And so it turns out that the story was never based on what Peter could do at all, but rather what could be done for him. His only part would be to get caught up in the very thing he'd been trying to catch everyone else with the whole time.

Movement #2

The Second Fire

PASTORAL CONVERSION & CRUCIFORMITY

Charcoal Fire on Galilee Shorline. © Withyou Ministries. Used with permission.

The world has sliced me

in two,

granite shelter sheered.

Facade falls away and I Am

Divided, it seems,

(I love You, I swear

I don't know

You

love me)

deeper than I had known before.

In time I may glory,

in the face now open.

HALFDOME

 # 8

Conversion

RESTORING & RESTORYING

So, in the end, every major disaster, every tiny error, every wrong turning,
every fragment of discarded clay, all the blood, sweat and tears —
everything has meaning. I give it meaning.
I reuse, reshape, recast all that goes wrong
so that nothing is wasted and nothing is without significance
and nothing ceases to be precious to me.

SUSAN HOWATCH

In the trance of the tide, Peter pours over dreams and denials.

The boat has fallen silent, his friends give him space. He has no answers left — only questions.

Was Jesus wrong? Is Jesus gone?

How could building a church result in all this wreckage?

How can a rock hold so much regret?

And one more — *why won't these nets catch any fish?*

It has happened twice now: This man who knows everything there is to know about fishing suddenly can't catch a thing. It's a classic tip-off. When something in our lives that has always worked suddenly won't, a death and resurrection process is happening. A new way is on offer, but first, we must let our old way die.

Peter's mind begins to wander. He wishes for a way to rewind, to go back three years. If only he could get another chance.

Then, from the far shore, without so much as asking permission, a voice lifts above the swells: "*Children, you have no fish, have you?*"[1]

Peter's reply is simple but contains a whole world of inner doubt, second-guessing, and stubborn hope. "*No.*"

He catches John's eye as if to ask, "Who said that?" Then, all at once, it hits him. It's the same scene. It's the same sea. It's the same stranger on the same shore, the same invitation to notice empty nets. It's a second chance to live again.

It's resurrection.

"It is the Lord!" Peter hears John exclaim.[2]

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[1] John 21:5.
[2] John 21:7.

He looks to the shore, then down at himself. He's still naked, the result of all the work and wounding. Shame made him hide three years ago, but Peter won't miss this chance. As if his life depended on it, as if he had heard an altar call, as if he could walk on water again — Peter threw on clothes, plunged into the sea, and baptized his life in the deep of forgiveness.

Felix Culpa

If Easter made all things new, Peter was one of the first recipients of re-creation. As he hit the water, it was hard to say if it was the sudden cold or sudden hope that arrested his system. Years later, Peter would pen mysterious words, a claim that Jesus preached good news to imprisoned souls in hades on Holy Saturday. Could Peter have been thinking of himself?

For a long time and at great cost, Peter had been stuck — old ways and old stories. All his courage and capacity had proven insufficient to find a path through those patterns and into deeper wholeness. At the base of things, Peter's imprisoning struggle was self-sufficiency. But now, he had been brought to a chasm he could not escape alone. At last, he was in a position to encounter someone other than himself. His place of profound stuckness turned out to be precisely where Jesus wanted him.

The vast imagination of the Gospel is that God tends to use the worst thing that can happen in a story as the very thing that saves the story. Jesus had plans to forgive Peter for his denial, but further wanted to turn the denial on its head and channel it into a broader healing in his life and ministry.[3] At the precise moment Peter's options ran out,

[3] Theologically speaking, we are in the territory of the *felix culpa* — the blessed or happy fall. The tradition reaches all the way back to Eden, where the fall of humanity resulted in so great a redemption being made possible. For Peter, his life-changing restoration in John 21 is the fortunate consequence of the unfortunate denial that would not have been possible had the denial never happened.

Jesus rescued him, not only to restore Peter relationally and vocationally but to unveil an economy that was never contingent on Peter in the first place.

This is forgiveness at its broadest and deepest level — something *given-for* us that we cannot earn or attain otherwise. It is the fulcrum on which the entire spiritual life swings. Peter had finally given up on saving himself, so at last he could be saved.

Can You Imagine?

My favorite piece in Lin-Manuel Miranda's stunning *Hamilton* is the song "It's Quiet Uptown." Alexander Hamilton's entire career has been built on the foundation of his prodigious work and wordsmithing. He has fought heroically and served valiantly. In midlife, he finally reaches the station in life to which he's always aspired.

But the journey to get there has taken too much out of him. Under tremendous pressure, he breaks — betraying his family through an act of unfaithfulness, a denial of vows. Hamilton spins up a plan to save himself using the tools and strategies that have always worked for him:

I wrote my way out of hell

I picked up a pen, wrote my own deliverance[4]

But this time, his go-to strategy backfires in a humiliating way. What has always worked now fails him. His nets are empty. If his story is going to continue, another way out, one he cannot see, will be required.

The pressure mounts to an intolerable level as his firstborn son is killed. Hamilton and his estranged wife retreat uptown — an escape, a safe place.

There, he stumbles aimlessly through the abyss his life has become:

there are moments when you're in so deep

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[4] Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Hurricane." Track 13, Disc 2 on Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording), 2016, Spotify audio.

it feels easier to just swim down /

he is working through the unimaginable

Then, in the show's most haunting moment, when all has been lost, Hamilton's wife comes to him — *a grace too powerful to name*. She places her hand on his as the ensemble sings:

forgiveness / can you imagine?[5]

I cry every time.

Forgiveness alone can open the unimaginable to a whole new imagination.

Still, forgiveness can be difficult to receive, particularly for pastors. Many of us get into ministry work because we want to be exceptionally dedicated to God. Like Peter, I want to lead for God and be someone God can uniquely depend on. Because of this, I never want to *need* forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift I speak of often, it's a promise I profess God has for others. But to need it myself can only mean I have somehow let God down. Receiving forgiveness, then, can almost feel like a values violation to a pastor — the very thing that has the capacity to turn the human story around necessarily means a failure of fidelity in another core part of our story.

I wonder how often I have pushed away the gift of forgiveness for fear of facing up to that?

And When You are Converted

With each stroke toward the shore, Peter's imagination is changing. The transitional space between water and land is an archetypal symbol of conversion and

[5] Lin-Manuel Miranda, Renée Elise Goldsberry. "It's Quiet Uptown." Track 18, Disc 2 on Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording), 2016, Spotify audio.

transformation.[6] It is the stuff of myths and epics — night sea journeys and sirens, sufferings and surrenders, losing and finding, and finally coming home.[7]

Peter starts to see it now — he has been sifted and in a deeply disorienting way. But suddenly, he remembers what Jesus had said next:

> Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and *when you are converted*, strengthen your brothers.[8]

On Galilee's shoreline, Peter is *converted* again. He is drawn deeper and deeper into the world, yet in the precise place his journey began.

Jesus In Our Stories

Another element of that morning that captures me: By the time the sun is up, Peter is not only restored but restoried.

Throughout John 21, Jesus recasts the critical moments that have shaped Peter's life thus far, then tells them in ways that reinterpret their meaning and reorient their purpose. Deep narratives and memories, things like fishing nets and fires, are played back to Peter but now given an alternate ending. We'll explore this in detail in the next chapter, but for a moment, the specifics are less important than this general observation: Jesus re-tells us our stories.

And we need him to. When life-changing things happen to us, time moves too fast and our perspective is too limited to rightly understand all that happens. But if we allow it, the Storyteller will meet us again at the watershed moments of our lives to show

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[6] Movies and literature rely on sea journey and shoreline motifs regularly. For example, the recent Disney movie Luca revolves around the threshold of water and the transformations that take place when we move from sea to land. Even the natural order is replete with instances of transformation taking place where water laps land. Evolutionary biology, for example, supposes life moved from water to land (perhaps in part to enhance vision and lead to a new way of seeing the world). See Jennifer Ouellette, "Why Did Life Move to Land? For the View," *Quanta Magazine*, March 7, 2017, https://www.quantamagazine.org/why-did-life-move-to-land-for-the-view-20170307/.

[7] Much of Peter's story follows the archetypal pattern of the world's great mythic tales. In his book, *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler explores how the call to adventure, the refusal of that call, the crossing of thresholds, the descent into the inmost cave, resurrection, and the return to others with a newfound healing "elixer" on the other side of dying are all part of the hero's journey.

[8] Luke 22:31-32 (modernized KJV), emphasis mine.

us all we missed and misunderstood the first time. Returning to the scene, we can powerfully experience Christ with us there, not as a passive bystander but as fellow sufferer and wounded healer.

Peter's Example for Pastors: *Restorying*

To be human is to hold wounds and traumas. To be a pastor is to meet people in the presence of their most pained spaces, while our own scarred stories tag along. This work can be wounding — we are caught in the crossfire of triggers, and the shrapnel we sustain has a way of surfacing our own experiences of abandonment, betrayal, and insufficiency. To stay the course we need practices through which our severedness can be re-membered, put back together again.

Pastor and theologian Greg Boyd speaks of the devastating abuse he endured as a child at the hands of his stepmother. "I just cut the cord that feels," he says. Boyd goes on, however, to describe a powerful experience of being imaginatively restoried.

> In prayer, I suddenly was speaking with my six-year-old self. I asked him, 'Has mommy been mean again?' Holding a matchbook, [my younger self] lit one fire after another, saying 'she'll never hurt me again'. I sat there with him. I told him he was a smart kid. I told him there would be a time when he would need to reconnect that cord. I told him when he got older, he would meet a man named Jesus who would make it safe to feel again.

Boyd describes the imagination as an inner thin-space where God can be closely encountered. He goes on to speak of Jesus entering the scene.

> The little boy looked up and saw Jesus. '*Mommy!*' he yelled as he ran to embrace Christ. After a while, Jesus asked my younger self if there was anything he wanted to give me for safekeeping until he got older. The boy thought about it a while, then finally handed me the matches, saying, 'I won't be needing these anymore.'

Reflecting on the experience, Boyd observes how embedded memories can be activated under the right circumstances. "All at once, the little boy pops back out. But we

can invite Jesus into these memories. As an adult, I know the good news, but who was going to tell that kid?"[9]

Jesus will. He retells us our stories.

[9] This story is shared in a sermon. Boyd's quotes are captured from audio, but not verbatim. Gregory A. Boyd, "Where's Mommy?," Woodland Hills Church, November 11, 2018, https://whchurch.org/sermon/wheres-mommy/.

#9

Confession

RECALL & RE-CALL

because we are all
betrayers, taking
silver and eating
body and blood and asking
(guilty) is it I and hearing
him say yes
it would be simple for us all to rush out
and hang ourselves

but if we find grace to cry and wait
after the voice of morning
has crowed in our ears
clearly enough
to break our hearts
he will be there
to ask us each again
do you love me?

LUCI SHAW

After what must have seemed an instant and an eternity, Peter finally reaches the shore. Dripping wet, he wipes long hair away from a sopping face and meets Jesus afresh.

Re-Call (John 21:1-8)

The parallels between Peter's first and second call stories are striking. They happen three years apart, yet both times, Jesus comes to Peter while he is fishing on Galilee's waters; both times, Peter has been unable to capture any fish; both times, Christ at first seems a stranger on the shore; both times, he guides Peter into a better approach that leads to a miraculous catch; both times, Peter is overcome by an awakening of who he is and who God is; both times, he is called into a deeper imagination for ministry vocation; both times, the story ends with an invitation: *Follow me!*

Three years earlier, Jesus accessed particular parts of Peter's intuition and imagination to birth a calling. Now, Jesus invokes these same things again to bring about reorientation (from disorientation), resurrected vocation (from the death of a dream), and deeper wholeness (on the other side of the wilderness).

Jesus gives space for the scene's senses to reverberate — the pull of the nets, the feel of the water, the sand beneath his feet. By echoing the precise events through which Peter first knew he was loved and chosen, Jesus effectively voices an absolution, an assurance to show Peter he is still loved and chosen, and, in fact, chosen again.

But despite the similarities, there are also critical differences in this second call that point to something new Jesus has already begun in Peter — things that could only have been understood and received after all this had happened in Peter's journey. Jesus' goal is not to lead Peter back to Eden — a time before the wounds — but rather to use the wounds themselves as a secret key to unlock a new sort of ministry. The hints are subtle but clearly communicate things will be different this time.

In Peter's first call, the profound catch of fish overwhelms and breaks his nets, but in the second call, the nets don't tear, and nothing is lost. In the first call, Peter exhausts himself to haul in the catch, but this time, he allows a community to work alongside him while he prioritizes getting to Jesus. In Luke 5's first call, Peter is invited to lead with a fisher's imagination; in John 21's second call, the fisher is given the ministry metaphor of a shepherd.

We could go on but would risk analyzing the beauty right out of the scene. John 21, for me, is a high-water mark in Scripture, far better imagined than inspected. It is a wonder of redemption, an alternate ending for a story gone sideways, a birthplace of renewal. Good news, indeed.

Recall (John 21:9-17)

Peter has been forgiven, but his mind still carries the past's memorized pain. Herman Bavinck held that memory is not merely a function in the brain or soul but instead is "the soul itself."[1] It is in the vast hall of memory, to use Augustine's phrase, where healing is most needed if we are to be re-storied.[2]

And so Jesus is not finished.

Having re-called Peter, he now wants to heal all Peter recalls. The Word begins to write midrash — fresh understanding, revelatory commentary, and reinterpreted meaning of old stories — over Peter's worst moments. Christ's plan is palpable from the moment Peter sets foot on shore.

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[1] Herman Bavinck, "Foundations of Psychology," August, 2019, https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/BR9_Foundations.pdf, 139.
[2] Augustine, *The Confessions* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 186.

The Second Fire

Having finally dared to get his hopes back up, Peter walks ashore and takes a deep breath. But with the inhale comes the unmistakable smell of smoldering charcoal.

More than any other, a person's sense of smell holds the ability to bring them back to a particular time, a precise memory. The scent of summertime grass, brewed coffee in autumn, or the way a street smells after a rainstorm is all it takes to viscerally transport us to another time and room in memory's grand hall. In Peter's case, there's no mistaking the distinct aroma of wood and earth as it wafts from the charcoal blaze.

Jesus has brought Peter to the second fire.

This must have seemed a bit on the nose, literally, to Peter. Was the fire a taunt, a cruelty? Had Peter been brought this far only to be chastised at the last, just to be dragged through a highlight reel of his life's lowest moments? The fire reignites the night of agony Peter has been desperately trying to forget. And for a moment, the pain is freshly kindled. But this time, Jesus will bring the story to full consummation.

In the events that follow, Jesus leads Peter through a Liturgy of Great Thanksgiving, though in reverse sequence to how the liturgical traditions of today practice it. First, Peter must reconcile with his community.

Community: Passing the Peace

One of the more insidious dangers of pastoring is how often the work leaves us isolated. To be a leader is to be the first one out of the boat, trusting the water will hold us while we walk to Jesus. To be a visionary is to see what others can't yet see, naming who the Christ is before others are willing to speak up.

And so a consequence of Peter's leadership amongst the disciples was that he was always out in front, the first one into fray or fire. We can live alone on the cliff-edge of things for a time, but eventually, the secluded stardom approach to ministry exacts a heavy toll.

Somewhere along the way, it seems the modern church was taught a lie that pastoral leadership requires the life of a lonely hero. The minister, we've heard, must build community for everyone else, yet never receive from or be a full member of that community themselves.

Of course, ministry requires mature leadership and the prudence of appropriate discretion and disclosure. Many decisions are only ours to make, and much of what comes across our desks will need be held in confidence, so a certain amount of loneliness is unavoidable. Still, there is a stark contrast between our contemporary tendency to push a single leader onto the rim of a church and Jesus' pattern of sending leaders out in pairs and groups. I have found that I need a community of partners in this work far more than I believe I am allowed to admit, especially if I want to be perceived as a strong leader.

Most of all, pastors need their communities when they have fallen short of their commitments to those communities. Yet it is often in our moments of great struggle or weakness that we either run or are rejected from the gifts of our own churches, and never experience the deep vulnerability and redemption of relational repair.

When a pastor is wounded or found wanting, or resigns or retires, the unquestioned assumption seems to be that they must also leave their church for the good of all involved. But it's a sad ecclesiology that presumes one's membership in a community is contingent on one's leadership in it. While sometimes it is wise or necessary to step away, we should push back on the notion that a pastor's community is

only as reliable as their ability to serve it. If we don't, we'll never experience what Peter did that morning.

At the moment he was most disqualified for leadership, Jesus brought Peter to a campfire circle of true friends. Peter had wounded his brothers in his unfaithfulness; he had abandoned his post. There are real consequences — relational and vocational — for this, and we shouldn't minimize them. Still, Jesus' healing for Peter began with his restoration into a company of pastors, a community of co-leaders. If Peter was to have any future in this work, it would need to begin with a conviction that he could no longer go it alone.

Soon, Peter will need to confess directly to Jesus, but first, he needs to repent and be re-membered to his community.[3] Familiar with mending broken fish nets, he sets out this time to repair broken relationships.

And so I imagine breakfast that morning involved the honest naming of wounds, the humble asking of forgiveness, the tender renewal of friendship. It's what always happens before a communion meal — we pass the peace we ourselves are receiving, spurred by the counter-instinctual commitment to do whatever it takes to come to the table in common-union.

Around the second fire, Peter learns he can be fully seen *and* fully loved, that he can survive looking bad in the presence of love.[4] Until now, Peter's life has been pendulum swings between inferiority and superiority. Now he is brought to center in community. It is a gift so few pastors are ever given.

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[3] In *Liturgical Theology*, Simon Chan points out variations on the classic liturgical confession which include words of confession to one another as well as to God: "I confess to to the Most Merciful God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault, in thought, word, and deed,
by what I have done, and by what I have left undone." See Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 133.

[4] A phrase I first heard from Larry Crabb. See Larry Crabb, *Real Church: Does It Exist? Can I Find It?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 23.

In the throes of the curses he had called down on himself, Peter's community showed up to go fishing with him anyway. When the catch was too great for him to handle, they pitched in to help. And now, around the fire, the resurrection peace Jesus promised would be spoken over the disciples — *and Peter* — was being realized.[5]

Peace of Christ, they said, embracing each other.

And also with you.

And also with Peter.

Communion: A Eucharistic Ministry

The community, now reunited, gathers around the sizzling fire. Peter looks at his friends and smiles. But then, he notices their smiles back — a mixture of mischief and wonder. He follows their eyes downward and sees a fish broiling over the fire.

All morning, he thinks, *I was working hard to catch fish — and Jesus had fish the whole time.* He laughs, finally getting the joke that would guide the remainder of his ministry. All he had been trying to do for Jesus, Jesus had already done.

Mandy Smith has observed that "as we try to be good at Christian leadership, we become pretty incompetent in the very thing we're actually supposed to be good at — trusting that someone else is doing the work."[6]

Staring down at fish over a fire, Peter sees how the haul he has been laboring to bring in has actually been brought right to him — and that he too was invited to a table where there was always and already fish enough. After years of working to serve Christ, it was Christ now serving him: "Come, have breakfast."[7]

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[5] See Mark 16:7.
[6] Mandy Smith, "As We Try to Be Good at Christian Leadership...," X (formerly Twitter), August 1, 2023, https://twitter.com/MandySmithHopes/status/1686191502157053952.
[7] John 21:12.

Somehow, as he so often does, Jesus slipped in quietly amidst the meal. With the Greek words that so often signal a eucharistic event, John 21 tells us Jesus "took the bread and gave it to them."[8]

Peter's life reveals the pattern that is so often true: What is done unto the bread is done unto us. We are chosen and blessed, held in bigger hands while the crust of our hard edges is cracked and broken, and then are given — first as thanksgiving back to the Father, and then into the open hands of a hungry world. We consume the meal, only to find it has consumed us. We offer what we held into Jesus' hands, only to find His body placed back into our open palms.

Take and eat, all of you.

Confession: The Assurance of Love

Soon, the meal is done. And for a moment, the events of the past few hours — a miraculous catch, a resurrection appearance, a community reunited — fade into the corners. The lens tightens once more on Jesus and Peter only.

They take a walk alone down the beachside. There, against the soundscape of crashing waves, they work through what went wrong and how the future might be. Eventually, Jesus asks a question that calls for confession and assurance, a question that cuts to the core of things: *"Do you love me?"*[9]

And for Peter, there is a whole lifetime bound up in that question. It's a question loaded with seeds that can replant a human being after disloyalty and disaster. Three times Peter was asked if he even knew Jesus, and now three times he is asked if he loves him. The memory of being questioned by another is reoriented toward a new tomorrow.

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[8] See John 21:13. This eucharistic structure — taking, blessing, breaking, giving — occurs in sequence in the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000, at the Last Supper, in St. Paul's communion instructions, and in the Emmaus story as Jesus is made known through the breaking of bread.
[9] John 21:15.

At last, the "I don't *know* him" can become "You *know* I love you."[10]

Peter's Example for Pastors: *Confession of Love*

Untold ink has been spilled debating how much to make of Jesus' word choices for "love," which shift from *agapaō* to *phileō* on the final ask. But whatever the logic of Jesus' language, it is clear the heart of the matter has to do with maturing the motivation driving Peter's ministry. Whatever other reasons Peter may have had in the past for following Jesus were being purified and purged at this second fire. Whatever lesser loves had formerly sparked pastoring in him would now need to be let go of, for love of Jesus.

The deeper we explore Peter's story, the more we realize this question — *do you love me more than these?* — was already reverberating long before Jesus asked it directly. Most likely, some form of that question is always coming to us pastors. Nouwen sees it as the central question of ministry. "It is not," he says, "how many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show some results? But: Are you in love with Jesus?"[11]

Tim Suttle, reflecting on Peter's response to that question, offers this:

> Peter knew exactly what he was getting himself into — what loving Jesus would require. He also knew that he had failed to live in fidelity to those requirements once before. Loving Jesus would make hefty demands on Peter's life… I have great respect for Peter's answer. It's truthful. Peter had begun to understand that the deep kind of *agapao* love that Jesus requires... is expressed in a life of faithfulness and fidelity to Jesus over time... We shouldn't be too eager to make claims about how much we love Jesus. All we can do is get on with the business of living in fidelity to Jesus all the days of our lives.[12]

Only after we have come to the end of ourselves do we have any appreciation for the second fire. We simply don't know how to tell Jesus we love him like this until we

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[10] John 21:15.
[11] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus,* 25.
[12] Suttle, *Shrink*, 221.

have lived our share of reversion and regret, yet find ourselves still convinced there is more loving and shepherding to do.

Restored and re-storied, re-called and re-membered, a pastor is prepared to begin again. This time, we will be fueled by a whole new fire.

#10

Participation

IN THE DIVINE NATURE

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete,
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

FR. KEN UNTENER

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness...
that we may become participants in the divine nature.

ST. PETER

Peter's pastoral life has been born again. The work that began under the raw horsepower of *ambition* has been brought into a wider story of *participation*. Healthy participation — getting in on what God is doing with and for others — holds the middle way between unexamined ambition and uncaring apathy.

On the beach of Galilee, Jesus reassures Peter that he still has a part to play in building the Church (perhaps more fruitfully now than ever) while freeing him from the superhuman need to play every part. This sort of invitation — from seizing to stewarding, from drivenness to discernment, from *my* commission to *our* co-mission — fits a classic pattern of maturing into a calling's full bloom.

First and Second People

In his essay, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik observes a stark difference in how the archetypal Adam is described from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2:

> The first Adam seeks to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28); that is, to conquer, to create, to dominate, to control. He seeks "majesty..." Adam the first is aggressive, bold, and victory-minded. His motto is success, triumph over the cosmic forces.[1]

But in Genesis 2, Adam suddenly appears to have "different goals," namely a desire to "cultivate and keep" the garden, to steward and serve it. Rather than trampling the earth and subduing animals, he tends the land and names animals.

Adam 1 is content with the accomplishments of a "functional utilitarian community"; Adam 2 seeks a "covenantal faith community." Adam 1 works alone; Adam 2 is split open from the side so a helper can be formed. Adam 1 knows only "Elohim," a cosmic and transcendental God; Adam 2 has met "Yahweh," a personal and intimate

[1] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 17.

creative partner. Adam 1 wants to do like his Creator (*imitatio Dei*); Adam 2 wants to be like his Creator (*imago Dei*).[2]

Soloveitchik argues the discrepancy is not merely because Genesis 1 and 2 were composed by dual traditions but because Adam's story bears witness to the duality of a human, the "real contradiction in the nature of man."[3] Inside each of us are competing stories, values in violation with one another, and tensions we must learn to make sense of.[4]

Bringing this into conversation with modern psychology, the language of Internal Family Systems proves helpful. Within each person, the approach suggests, lie separate parts. Every part needs a seat at the table and must be given voice within the long conversation of a life. As such, both parts of Adam's archetypal expression are legitimate. Both must have their say if we are to live the full range of humanity.

Yet the sequence is clear: Our first way of being eventually matures into the second, and never the other way around. As we grow in wisdom, we are increasingly led from a secure, settled core — the image of God within. We are led into who we most truly are at the center. Other parts of us are de-centered, taken from our side, so to speak, and it is necessarily painful. But surprisingly, this sort of loss makes our divided lives increasingly integrated and whole.

First and Second Peter

Eventually, our story needs not only results but redemption, not only feats but forgiveness, not only conquest but cruciformity.

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[2] Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, x.
[3] Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 10.
[4] As an Enneagram 3 with a strong 4 wing, this sort of tension plays out palpably in my day-to-day ministry leadership. One part of me seeks to acheive alone, another to create with companions. One part slams the gas pedal, another pumps the brakes. One part wants to look really good, the other wants to be really honest.

Adam's pattern repeats. We see a similar transformation take place in Abraham, whose journey led him from a vague knowing of God up in the stars (Gen. 15) to personal communion with the triune God around a table (Gen. 18). There it is again in Moses, whose first set of stone commandments had to be broken (Ex. 32) so that he might receive the same instructions again, but this time from God face-to-face (Ex. 34). Similar conversions can be observed in the stories Jacob, Joseph, Elisha, David, Saul/Paul, and of course Peter.

At the first fire, Peter experienced a loss that could not be recovered through one more triumph. His journey needed to be encountered and healed, not overcome. And it brought him to a second fire, where he experienced a new depth of participation in confession, communion, and community. Peter began to see his life not as something to cling to with closed fists but as something being given away with open hands — a posture he could never have permitted before.

Peter's Example for Pastors: *Pastoring as Participation*

If there was an Adam 1 and Adam 2, a Peter 1 and Peter 2, might there be similar movements in the maturation of our own lives?

Growing up as people and pastors means we increasingly find ourselves swept up in a big Story, one larger than our own lives and goals. It means we learn to participate as beloved parts of a beloved community, team members who cooperate (rather than compare/compete or catch/construct) with others. We learn to hold our drive to change people and the whole world more loosely. We no longer need so much to be great or do

greatly over and against others — it turns out all that *great* gets in the way of what is *good*.[5]

At the heart of this project is that sort of maturing applied to ministry — a conversion from being one kind of pastor to another. Following Adam's example, what themes would emerge if we were to chart "Pastor 1" and "Pastor 2" in our journeys? How might we hold things like leadership, worship, and companionship differently on the other side of life's first lap?

One example in my own pastoral story has to do with the way I relate to names. When I got my start in ministry, every new name represented an opportunity to grow the church larger. I cared for each person but ultimately saw their presence as another notch on the large mission God had sent me on. These days, every name holds a sacred story worthy of being voiced in its own right.

> And so pastoral work is a concentration on names… The pastor (like Adam in the garden) gives names — presents a person by name at the baptismal font, invokes the name of God at the table... and combines those names in every pastoral conversation and prayer.[6]

I used to track each name in a workflow as they assimilated, attended, volunteered, and gave financially to the church. Now I track names so I might learn to greet each person in the communion line personally, handing bread and wine as I assure them their name is known in a beloved community. The spreadsheet looks the same.

But the difference, I'm finding, is as wide as the gap between subduing and serving.

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[5] Suttle argues that for pastoral work, great is the enemy of good, not the other way around. See Suttle, *Shrink,* 43. Merton offers a similar invitation: "We are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance." Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 313.
[6] Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 48.

Participants in the Divine Nature

Later in his life, Peter would put pen to paper. His pastoral writing implored readers to take seriously the extraordinary invitation to live as participants in Jesus' very way and nature.[7] I suspect that invitation was first born in Peter's heart on the Galilean shoreline of John 21.

A second starting line was taking shape for Peter's ministry. From here on out, his pastoring would be a form of participating in all he observed in Jesus. At first, Peter wondered what Jesus had seen in him. But now his concern shifted to what he could see in Jesus. And what he observed formed a new imagination for how to do the work of Jesus in the way Jesus did it.

Two things came to the forefront: First, Jesus was a Good Shepherd, and second, good shepherds lay their lives down for the sheep.

Peter made up his mind to participate and imitate in both.

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[7] 2 Peter 1:1-4.

#11

Co-Mission

PETER, WHEN YOU GROW OLD

Vocation comes into being

on that thin strip of sand between sea and land

where Jesus, so recently out of the fish's belly himself,

breakfasted with his disciples and commanded them to be pastors.

EUGENE PETERSON

In the same manner the Father sent me,

so I send you.

JESUS

One of my favorite communion liturgies, from the Iona Abbey, invites to the table "you who have tried to follow, and all of us who have failed."[1]

There are times in life — for all of us — when we fail, times when the fuel of our trying to follow runs out. Good ideas can't lead us through that place and back into communion. Only a Good Shepherd can.

The Good Shepherd asks gently, "Do you love me?"

Peter nods in affirmation.

Well then, Jesus essentially says, *it's time to get back at it.*

But this time, in a different way: "Feed my sheep... Tend my lambs."[2]

This brief conversation — sixty or so simple words, three brief back-and-forths — has been called "one of the most spectacular interchanges in the whole Bible."[3] And rightly so. Because on the other side of betrayal, Jesus has more on offer for Peter than mere amends. "The most remarkable thing," N.T. Wright says, is that "by way of forgiveness, Jesus gives Peter a job to do."[4] The payoff is a fresh vocation, a new spirit for old work, a resurrected purpose.

Paul Ricoeur has it this way: "Beyond rational and critical thinking, we need to be called again."[5] And so Peter's "called again" conversation is brought to completion, but the implications of it were just beginning.

When that morning gave way to sunset and Peter found himself alone, I wonder how he made sense that day. Did he replay each moment? Re-live each conversation?

It must have hit him at some point: *Jesus changed the metaphor*.

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[1] The Iona Community, *Iona Abbey Worship Book*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), 53.
[2] John 21:15-17.
[3] N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 55.
[4] Wright, *John for Everyone*, 55.
[5] Quoted in Richard Rohr, "The Ability to Hold Paradox," Center for Action and Contemplation, August 24, 2020, https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-ability-to-hold-paradox-2020-08-24/. See also Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations,* 1st ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

Why did Jesus — the Logos, the Author of Life, the Storyteller so intentional and precise with language — suddenly shift the symbol of Peter's call from a fishing image to a shepherding one?

The Renewing of Our Minds

It is that question that has reframed my entire understanding of the vocation of pastoring, and we'll unpack it in detail during the final section of this project. But for now, we simply need to notice the shift in Jesus' call language and ask why he has chosen to save it for this particular moment.

Here's one possibility: It wasn't until death and resurrection were accomplished (in both of them) that this new call could possibly be lived. In the light of a new creation and Jesus' new family, Peter's old methods for ministry no longer fit. He would need a resurrected imagination now, a transformation that could only come through what his later-in-life colleague Paul would call the "renewing of the mind.[6]"

"Fish people" becomes "feed sheep." A means of trapping is swapped out for a means of tending. The language of luring is exchanged for the language of loving.

Peter, When You Grow Old

For Peter, there's only one picture worthy of his vocational imagination now. Laying down bait and hook, he takes up rod and staff. It's how he's going to keep following Jesus. His pre-Christ way of working now must be abandoned in favor of Jesus' own way, the way of a shepherd.

It is well-established that Jesus sends his Church out on mission. "As the Father has sent me," Christ says, "so I send you."[7] Yet, all too often, we are content to hear those

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[6] Romans 12:1.
[7] John 20:21.

words as evidence of our mission, but not evidence of the manner in which that mission should be done. Todd Hunter, however, has argued that Jesus not only intended his followers to join his work but to join it through the precise same manner, motivation, and means that Jesus does.[8]

Peter, then, is not only invited to become a shepherd but a specific sort of shepherd with a particular posture and practice. And so Jesus' next words, which immediately follow, are contextually crucial:

> Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.

For Love of Jesus, I Will Let Go

The phrase "for love of Jesus, I will let go" has become a breath prayer of sorts for me these past years. These words never seem needed in the daytime, when the path ahead is lit. These are words reserved for sundown, words to keep company in the dark.

For Love of Jesus

Jesus plants the ministry task of "feeding sheep" within the larger soil of love. "If you love me," he begins, then from that love, "tend my lambs." And here we find just enough jagged rock to hold to in the moments our ministry seems dangling a cliff.

We were not, first of all, called to lead churches. We were not, most foundationally, asked to change anything. Pastoring itself is not even our primary task. Rather:

> Here is the secret of all Christian ministry, yours and mine: If you're going to do any single solitary thing as a follower and servant of Jesus, this is what it's built on. Somewhere, deep down inside, there is a love for Jesus, and though (goodness knows) you've let him down enough times, he wants

[8] Todd Hunter, "What Is the Purpose of the Church?," Substack newsletter, The Gospel of the Kingdom (blog), January 25, 2023, https://bishoptoddhunter.substack.com/p/what-is-the-purpose-of-the-church.

> to find that love, to give you a chance to express it, to heal the hurts and failures of the past, and give you new work to do.[9]

St. Therese of Lisieux, a 19th-century Carmelite nun, died of tuberculosis at the tender age of 24. Near the end of her life, a question continued to nag her. What specifically, she wondered, was her vocation in the church? One day, after reading 1 Corinthians 13, something clicked:

> I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, so I understood that the Church has a Heart and that this Heart was burning with love. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church's members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles could not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood.[10]

Something stirred in her soul. She had worried for years about the adequacy of her ministry, whether her life's work for Jesus had been enough. But here, she found release:

> Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my love, my vocation, at last I have found it... *My vocation is love!* Yes, I have found my place in the Church... I shall be Love. Thus I shall be everything and thus my dream will be realized.[11]

Boil whatever else of our work away, and just one thing is left: Loving Jesus.

And if love for Jesus is our bedrock task, we can finally surrender whatever other outcomes may come. *Feed my sheep*, Jesus says, not because the church is successful but because you love me. *Tend my lambs,* Jesus calls, not because you are understood, but because you love me. *Feed my sheep*, Jesus cries, though the church you build may one day decide it no longer needs you; though your position on a hot-button issue may shift and you are voted out; though what you've dreamed at dusk may never materialize in the morning; though good friends may leave for another pasture. *Feed sheep anyway.*

And why? For love of Jesus.

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[9] Wright, *John for Everyone*, 55.
[10] Marc Foley, *The Love That Keeps Us Sane: Living the Little Way of St. Therese of Lisieux (*New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 80.
[11] Foley, *The Love That Keeps Us,* 80.

I Will Let Go

But what does it mean to love Jesus? For Peter, it means following Jesus in motivation and means. And this calls him into a new form, a cruciform, a ministry of outstretched arms and open hands. In his essential reflections on Christian leadership, Henri Nouwen points us down the road Jesus says Peter must walk.

> Jesus sends us out to be shepherds, and Jesus promises a life in which we increasingly have to stretch out our hands and be led to places where we would rather not go... He asks us to move from a concern for relevance to a life of prayer, from worries about popularity to communal and mutual ministry, and from a leadership built on power to a leadership in which we critically discern where God is leading.[12]

A major motif in Peter's ministry journey has been his struggle to give up control — but though it's only been three years, Peter has grown *older* now. Peter the Elder is able to receive what would have sounded foolish to Peter the Adolescent.

And with a gulp, he takes it in — to grow up in Jesus' way is to let go.

Peter's Example for Pastors: Becoming Shepherds

It's one thing to read or write this, another to live it. Can we trust Jesus when we are led away from our preferred path? Can we keep our hearts open when our hands are forced open, too?

In his later writings, Peter repeatedly invokes these shepherding themes of love, leading, and letting go.

> *Now as an elder myself* and a witness of the sufferings of Christ... I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge... Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. [13]

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[12] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 52.
[13] 1 Peter 5:1-9, emphasis added.

Or, "You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls."[14] Or, "Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins."[15]

Reading verses like these against the backdrop of Peter's own reversion and conversion paints them in a fresh light. He wrote for others, but it was him who had strayed and then returned to a shepherd; it was his own great stain that had been covered by love. Forgiven much, he who would love much in return.[16]

Peter is invited to become a shepherd mere days after the church around him has suffered a bewildering loss and renewal. Having just been brought through that same sort of death and rebirth in his own life, Peter was prepared to meet the moment. Soon enough, the Church will be baptized in a new Spirit at Pentecost. Having just been given a new spirit from which to live into his own restorying, Peter was uniquely able to understand and preach to what was happening. Peter could write that Jesus knew the way out of hell only because he had lived that path personally. Peter could speak of participating in the divine nature only because he had begun to open his hands to it.

St. Paul writes that God "comforts us in all our trouble so that we can comfort other people who are in every kind of trouble." And how? By offering "the same comfort that we ourselves received from God."[17]

This is the mystery of ministry with open hands: We are finally placed in a posture to receive what we most deeply need from God ourselves, then find that same gift we have received can be offered to others when they need it most. The ministry we most needed has become our ministry.

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[14] 1 Peter 2:25.
[15] 1 Peter 4:8.
[16] Luke 7:47.
[17] 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

#12

Imitation

WHAT PETER SEES IN JESUS (THE CROSS-SHAPED SHEPHERD)

This is the secret of the true pastor —

that the life of the Good Shepherd

is being lived in them.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

In the evening of life,

we will be judged on love alone.

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

It is difficult enough to live open-handed. The Edenic instinct to grip and grab with all we've got dies slowy. But stretching out our arms, chest exposed and heart open, is riskier still.

Go ahead and try it right now.

Taking this shape means being pulled in two directions at once, hung in a tension we cannot resolve. The sternum raises, shouldblades pinch back, the neck slightly lifts. Our arms tire almost immediately, heavy though holding nothing. And our heart, our life center, is pressed to the front lines — exposed and entrusted to whatever comes next. This is the form of abandon, a form of radical receptivity, a form that sounds five alarms within. It is the shape of the cross, God's way of being in the world.

Peter never witnessed the cross, but his friend John was there. Standing below the beams that pinned Jesus into this precarious position, John was close enough to hear it all: Harried, shallow breaths; Christ's final whispers; the giving away of a mother into his care. It was a picture John could never erase from his mind.

Traditionally, it is held that this same John was later exiled to Patmos, where he saw another vision, a revelation of Christ. In the revelation, John received a profound picture that turns conventional wisdom about the utility of the cross on its head. The Good Shepherd, John sees, was also "the Lamb who was slaughtered before the creation of the world."[1]

In other words, the cross was not, at its most essential reality, something Jesus *did* but rather how Jesus *is*.

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[1] Revelation 13:8 (GWT). This verse is difficult to translate, and its sequence is rendered differently in various versions. However, New Testament scholar Robert Mulholland is adamant that the Greek syntax makes the appropriate order clear: "'The ones whose names were not written' — written where? 'In the Book of Life" — what Book of Life? The Book of Life 'of the Lamb' — what Lamb? The one 'who was killed' — killed when? 'Before the world was made.'" See M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2011), 519.

When was Christ crucified? We might answer the Year 33, and in a sense, we'd be correct. But we also might answer: "Long before God ever said '*let there be light*.'"

Before there was any sin problem to solve or atonement to be accomplished, Christ was already cross-shaped, already the essence of cruciform, co-suffering, self-emptying Love. It is simply his way of being, how he is powerful, the throne from which he reigns.[2]

The lamb is slaughtered, yet John sees more: "I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne."[3] Slain, John says — yet standing. Crucified, yet upright as if arisen. Carrying his wounds with him, Christ is more alive at the end of the story than ever — the perfect picture of a wounded healer.

A Final Following

All this plays in the background of Jesus' final invitation to Peter:

> When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.' Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them...When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!'

We aren't given any indication of what happens next. Did Peter smile nervously? Did Jesus laugh to break the tension? Did they walk together back to the fire to greet the other disciples? A lot has happened in one short morning. But this much is clear: In the end, Peter is not only called to imitate Jesus in life but also in death.

Having already made momentous and creedal confessions of faith, Peter is finally called into his greatest leap of faith: The mystery of mimicry. To keep on following Jesus,

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[2] Later in life, Peter will affirm this reality in his own words: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you…" (1 Peter 1:20). See also Mulholland, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary,* 520.
[3] Revelation 5:6 (NIV).

he will spend his remaining years in that awkward, unnatural form, living into the call of the cross for the sake of others. It will be his ultimate participation in the divine nature, the imitation of all he sees in Jesus.

After years of unlearning in the school of Christ, this was Peter's ultimate leadership lesson. The vocation of love, a ministry of shepherding, always expresses itself most clearly through self-giving cruciformity. Good shepherds lay their lives down.

And so, "Jesus asks, 'Do you love me?' We ask, 'Can we sit at your right hand and your left hand in Your Kingdom?'"[4]

But now Peter remembers who actually ended up at Christ's right and left as he entered glory that Good Friday: Former thieves who got caught up in Christ's orbit and ended their lives cross-shaped. He thought about his own story. Perhaps he could end up with Jesus at the cross after all.

A Final Fire

The Gospel accounts of Peter's ministry with Jesus end here. But his legacy of pastoral leadership had stories still to be told.

Soon, it was Pentecost, that day when a simple prayer gathering was interrupted by unforeseen tongues of flame pouring out on the disciples. It was the third time a fire reoriented Peter's life and leadership. He must have grinned, wondering at what point this whole motif would become cliché.

More tender and content in the shadows than ever, Peter was ironically prepared to step to the forefront of leadership in that pivotal moment. No longer needing the limelight, he was positioned to stand in it with courage and clarity. By the end of the day, there was little doubt who the lead pastor of the early Church was.

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[4] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus,* 45.

There isn't room in this project to examine Peter's ministry through Acts, his Epistle writings, and the apocryphal literature that sketches his later ministry journeys. We know that Peter oversaw the writing of the first Gospel (Mark). From the pattern of his memory, the other synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Luke took shape.

Peter oversaw the replacement of Judas, he performed the first healing of the apostolic age, he spoke boldly before the civil and religious authorities, he counseled and vouched for Paul, he escaped prison, he traveled 1,500 miles from Jerusalem to Rome (his wife likely ministering alongside him). The tradition holds that Peter was crucified in Rome around AD 64, upside-down, cross-shaped to the end.

Peter's Example for Pastors: *A Leadership of Love*

The modern church, it seems to me, does not stand in need of more mission or vision, more strategy or hustle. We have no lack of leaders, no shortage of stars. But there is a great need for wounded healers, mothers and fathers, cruciform shepherds.

As we prepare to step away from Peter's story, it is worth reflecting on how we, too, might be called into the kind of maturity that mimics Jesus' posture in the world. How might our vision for leadership change if we took Jesus at his word that to follow him likely means ending up where we'd prefer not go?

A while back, I came across a post from a friend whose ministry was becoming well-known. Seeing my friend's voice amplified, I found myself envious — feeling insecure and unseen. Instinctually, my body took on an anti-cross shape. I braced, sucked in my stomach, hunkered down to insulate my sullen heart. I named to God my frustration, my limitations, my misplaced expectations. And in kindness, God made space for all of it.

But then, with Peter's story taking up so much space in my imagination, something else slipped in. The words, absent tone, seem harsh and uncaring. But they came to me lightly, with an air of mischief and invitation: "What is it to you if I shine a light on his ministry but hide you in obscurity? You, follow me."

Very few of us pastors in the developed West will be martyred for our ministry. It is highly unlikely that we'll ever be in the position to follow Jesus, like Peter did, into a cruciform death. But that's not the point. Instead, our takeaways flow reflecting on questions like these:

- What is the shape of my leadership posture?
- How, what, and who am I being formed to love as I pastor?
- Where am I being invited into counter-instinctual trust or the abandonment of my preferred plans in favor of co-suffering service?
- What realities of my heart are impeding my ability to follow Jesus into a cross-shaped vision for the future?

A God-Open Life

Jesus' final words always seem the same: *Follow me!*

He invites us into a future we cannot insure, change, or defend against. But his invitation to cruciformity is not for the sake of a miserable existence, a joyless vocation where we suffer today but earn some eternal payoff. Instead, Jesus — in his cruciform essence — is teaching us how to truly live.

Right now, Christ is alive, slain but still standing. It is precisely this posture through which He mediates the Father's ministry of love. He invites us into the most eventful, God-open life and ministry imaginable.

"Stretch out your arms," he says, motioning to tomorrow. "Follow me."

PART 3

Imagination

METAPHOR & MOTIVATION *in* MINISTRY

An undivided heart I will give you, a new spirit I will put within you.

EZEKIEL 11:19 & 36:26

It is the imagination that must shift, the huge interior of our lives

that determines the angle and scope of our vocation.

EUGENE PETERSON

Galilee on the Water. © Withyou Ministries. Used with permission.

Jesus himself authored Peter's first call:

"Follow me... I'll make you fish for people."[1]

They were life-changing words, giving birth to a meaningful ministry of adventure and obedience. But after a long journey, after Peter had been led downward through descent and denial and had been risen into a fresh daybreak, there was another invitation.

"*Feed my sheep... Follow me.*"[2]

This was an overflow of Easter, the resurrection of Peter's purpose.

This was a forerunner to Pentecost, the gift of a new spirit for the life he had.

The fisher was called, for love of Jesus, to spend the rest of his life as a shepherd (a work we assume he knows nearly nothing about).

I find myself fascinated by this.

Why does Jesus, so adept at offering the perfect parable or word picture at the perfect time, suddenly shift the metaphor that had long-shaped Peter's imagination for ministry?

We know this for sure: For all its richness, "fisher" is not the deepest symbol of calling Jesus had for Peter. It's not that it was an invalid calling, but it was incomplete, inconsummate.

The Word had more to say.

The mere existence of a shifted image, a second invitation flowing from the second fire, meant there was further to follow still.

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[1] Mathew 4:19.
[2] John 21:17, 19 (CEB). In both call narratives, the deepest invitation was identical: Don't stop following Jesus.

#13

A New Fire

FROM FISHERS TO SHEPHERDS

When we grapple with understanding anything of importance,
we speak with analogies, distilled as images. It follows, then, that the
uppermost goal of one's pilgrimage is to be discovered by a primary image,
so powerful that it is able to hold in place the assorted pieces of one's life.
Such an image gives birth to a basic rhythm and liturgy.
Put another way, our existential task is to discover a primal image
sufficient to sacralize our time and space.

W. PAUL JONES

But it takes us much longer to discover 'the task within the task,'...
what we are really doing when we are doing what we are doing.

RICHARD ROHR

At the outset of this project, I described arriving at a crossroads. I wanted to continue being a pastor, but it didn't feel faithful to pastor in the ways I knew how.

On the far side of the journey Jesus had led me on, my old models for ministry felt increasingly incongruent, like slipping on a worn-out shoe. My training, both in the theologies and technologies of this work, seemed more and more at odds with the realities of my lived experience, my pain and healing, and my understanding of God.

The wind on the water was shifting.

For a time, I kept trying to drop my ministry nets like before, but they came up feeling frustratingly empty. I grew less sure if I was still following Jesus or just doing what I had always done. A nagging sense formed that the definitions, motivations, and functions of my work needed reorientation and renewal.

I needed a new pastoral imagination.

The Power of Metaphor

Jesus invites every pastor on a journey of transformation through the gift of imagination, just as he did for Peter. If we pastors aim to keep on following Jesus, it's almost a mortal lock. At some point, likely after we've walked through a fire in life, we will be asked to trade in whatever guiding images have served us up to that point.

And why? Because we live our metaphors.[1]

In their pioneering work *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson argue that our "ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature."[2] As such, metaphors "govern our everyday functioning, down to

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[1] I've heard Trygve Johnson use this phrase several times over the past years. In a lecture for Western Seminary on approximately May 16, 2022, he said (as best as I was able to capture it): "Metaphors guide us into a new way of seeing. Baptism is not just water, it's an immersion into death and resurrection. Communion is not just food, it's the eschatological banquet. The metaphors we use guide our self-talk about how we're doing in our work."

[2] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3.

mundane details… and structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people."[3]

Metaphors are subtle and subversive. They run in the background of our lives, almost silently, yet play a critical role in how we make meaning of things. They craft the stories we tell ourselves and cast the images that soon enough shape us.

If we allow them, our imaginations can be powerful tools in our spiritual formation. God offers an invitation to grow, and the imagination echoes "yes and amen" by adopting a corresponding image we can grow into. Through the gift of our imagination, we are given a new way of seeing, which spurs us toward a new way of being. Eugene Peterson has it this way:

> If we want to change our way of life, acquiring the right image is far more important than diligently exercising willpower. Willpower is a notoriously sputtery engine on which to rely… but a right image silently and inexorably pulls us into its field of reality, which is also a field of energy. [4]

In other words, imagination is both the fuel system (the energy and impulse) and the navigation system (the orientation and telos) driving our ministry work. At first, metaphor may feel like nothing more than rhetorical flourish, an accessory to the real language of our lives.

But on further review, we find that the right metaphor, especially if it is visual, can hint and nudge us into cognitive associations that matter deeply. If we follow our undergirding images for ministry down to their imaginative ends, we'll find they hold tremendous power in shaping our pastoring.[5]

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[3] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 3.
[4] Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 15.
[5] For example, the title of this project is *Becoming a Shepherd*, which is metaphorical in itself. I'm not becoming a shepherd, nor have I ever met a real-life shepherd. I'm not sure I've ever spent more than five minutes in a pasture. Yet "pasture" makes me think of "pastor," and pastor makes me think of a shepherd, shepherd makes me think of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who stretched out his arms for the sake of others. So should I, I remind myself, if I'm becoming a shepherd. What started as a metaphor has shaped the way I work.

Peter 1 & 2: A Pastoral Life in Two Parts

Read in the context of Peter's story, the metaphors of "fishing" and "shepherding" do not merely speak to different characteristics or charisms for ministry we can choose off a menu. Instead, it seems Jesus carefully chose those particular metaphors as invitations to live into as one grows in ministry maturity.[6]

Note the recurring two-fold distinctions in Peter's pastoral life. First, his journey can be separated into two broad movements of wisdom and Christlikeness ("when you are young" and "when you grow old"). Then, those two movements are crystallized and summarized by the events of the first and second fires (which function as symbolic microcosms of his entire story). Finally, each movement is paired with a thematic and corresponding metaphor (first, a "fisher," then a "shepherd") that Peter could understand and become in that movement of life.

Becoming a Shepherd	PETER 1	PETER 2
Maturity	When you are young...	When you grow old...
Motivation	The First Fire	The Second Fire
Metaphor	Fisher	Shepherd

Just as a child grows into an adult, we can expect our "first following" of Jesus to lead to increasingly mature forms of following. This does not mean we were wrong or bad to be children — only that growing up is a necessary part of life well-lived.

[6] Different metaphors may spark different associations for each person, so ultimately, we must each pay attention to how we are being invited to envision our work. Still, I suspect that whatever our preferred metaphors, Jesus will invite us into images that mature our motivations in a sequence similar to Peter's.

Pastor 1 & 2: From Fishers to Shepherds

Peter's story provides language that has helped me make sense of something I couldn't otherwise pin down: I was taught to lead, plant, and pastor churches with a fishing imagination. I had learned a ministry that was all about the boat and the catch, but not the fish. I had become practiced in building the vessel, baiting the waters, dragging the nets, crafting attractive hooks, and reeling in each bite. I had come to value an always-impressive haul, a bigger and better boat.

And I don't think I'm the only one. Large swaths of the Western Church seem to have become obsessed with and stuck on their first calling, a ministry fueled by a fishing motivation. Whatever words we use for it, peel back the modern-day church leadership conversation and we'll find it animated by a fisher's goals more than we care to admit.

Trapping vs. Tending

Fishers start each day with a simple objective: Fill up the boat as quickly and fully as possible. The fisher is primarily interested in what they do not yet have, their dominant eye fixed on what has not yet been caught.

Shepherds start each day too with a simple objective: Nurture, guide, and protect the sheep. The shepherd is primarily interested in the flock they already have, their dominant eye fixed what has already been entrusted to the fold they steward.

Below the surface is a subtle but significant difference in motivation and objective — one seeks to catch what has not yet been given, the other to care for what has been given. These impulses are as old as time. The Genesis 3 reflex is to grasp and seize what we fear is not ours; the Genesis 1-2 reflex is to lead and tend what is. One impulse leads

to sinful misstewardship, the other to prayerful fellowship. This same distinction can be seen in the metaphorical invitations offered to Peter to shape his ministry.

It's no wonder we are drawn into a pastoral posture of fishing: There is an adrenaline surge, a thrill of the catch, that comes with pursuing any elusive prize we hope to apprehend. Too often our appetite to acquire more from life becomes insatiable and is subtly ported onto our pastoring. Ministry becomes the means we use to grab the next "win" and get our next "fix." We walk away from our flock to head back to the waters, looking for one more thing to mount on the wall, one more big fish tale we can share. And so we need to be honest with ourselves: Is it God's calling — or my craving — that is driving the next church initiative, building campaign, or book proposal?

Reeling in a great catch provides a high that is hard to beat, a sense that we still have what it takes to make new things happen. In comparison, tending what we've long-since become familiar with can feel rather boring and sometimes small. The novelty wears off quickly, the warts begin to show. If we are to tend the flock we actually have for any length of time, we will need to root ourselves in a larger story, a more mature perspective.

Catching vs. Cultivating

Pastoring shaped by a fishing imagination suggests primary energies be spent on catching what we fear will not be given. Soon, we are giving our best energy and presence to that which seems most attractive and attractional. We craft compelling hooks and drag wider nets than our limits can sustain.

I used to work at a church that marketed each new sermon series to non-Christians through newspaper ads and yard signs. We sincerely desired to see people swimming in life's lesser waters be brought into Christ's living waters. But the creativity required to outdo ourselves constantly was demanding, and soon, I was a pastor who

spent most of my time designing graphics and making videos. It was fun work (I loved our "boat" and wanted others to come aboard) — but it was not pastoral work.

Once, we purchased billboards all over the city to promote an upcoming marriage event; another time, we plastered the streets with yard signs to advertise our Easter services (often placing them on others' property without asking permission). But neither time did we have a thoughtful plan in place for what to do after we "caught" people — how to provide care for those in marriage crisis or ongoing presence to those who came on Easter. "Schools" of people swarmed the events, as happens when you drop bread into the water. But I can't say we got to know many of their names. Caught fish, it seems, rarely become mature sheep.

The shepherd is interested in growth and new life, too — but organic growth, reproductive life, sustainable development. Shepherds know that only healthy sheep can create healthy sheep, so they nourish and nurture with intentionality. They cultivate community with restraint, learning when to say "enough." The shepherd knows their limits and the boundaries of their place and seeks to cultivate not only a haul but the sort of growth and life that can last the long haul.

Wendell Berry's imagination for sustainable ecology looms large here. Berry speaks of the danger of "generalizing the world," arguing that the "devil's work is abstraction — not the love of material things, but the love of their quantities."[7] Eugene Peterson, riffing on Berry's work, is worth quoting at length:

> When I take up that attitude, I see the congregation as raw material to manufacture an evangelism program, or a mission outreach... Before I know it, I'm pushing and pulling, cajoling and seducing, persuading and selling... It is a highly effective way to develop a religious organization. People are motivated to do fine things, join meaningful programs, contribute to wonderful causes. The returns in number and applause are considerable. But in the process, I find myself dealing more and more

[7] Berry, *Home Economics*, 51 and Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981, 279. Quoted by Peterson in *Under the Unpredictable Plant,* 169.

> in causes and generalities and abstractions… Religious work-in-general is not pastoral... our work is not to make a religious establishment succeed but to nurture the gospel of Jesus Christ into maturity. Holiness cannot be imposed; it must grow from the inside... When I work in the particulars, I develop a reverence for what is actually there instead of a contempt for what is not.[8]

Keeping vs. Stewarding

No matter how effective yesterday's work was, the fisher finds their nets empty again the next day. So the church that attracts with bait will constantly be searching for more and better bait. We'll work hard to patch any gaps in our nets and improve last week's service to ensure a competing attraction (or other church) won't best us. Putting our hands on all these hooks eventually causes us to lose our sensitivity, our touch, and we become unsure of what is too dull or sharp.

A friend recently asked how much our anxious attempt to keep people in church, on a broad scale, flows from being inundated with the message that people are leaving church in droves. When we see statistics, hear of the "rise of the nones," or find folks more interested in Sunday brunch than worship, do we panic? It could be that the trend toward a fishing ministry model is a reactive attempt to control a culture that seems to be squirming away. Ironically, our efforts to keep folks on the boat only accentuate the very reasons many are leaving. Anxious pastoring always turns controlling and manipulative, and who wants to be a part of that?

Keeping a church on the hook eventually places the pastor on it. What began as a sincere attempt to evangelize ends up discipling the church to only appreciate that which is shiny, things that go down easy. Fishing this way inevitably breeds consumerism — it is incongruent with a sustainable Christian life.

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[8] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 169.

While I was a bi-vocational church planter, I also ran a web design agency. We did some work in the area of *remarketing*. Remarketing is responsible for that phenomenon where you visit a website to look at a shirt and then suddenly start seeing ads for that shirt on every other website you visit. The idea is to learn what the user is interested in, then feed that interest repeatedly to capture the sale before it is lost. Websites even follow the movement of a user's mouse to detect their "exit intent," ensuring they are hit with at least one more ad before they can squirm away unsold.

This same sort of thing has motivated me often as a pastor. I would sense distance from a parishioner — perhaps their attendance or giving pattern changed, or they became reserved relationally. My anxious alarm would go off, and I would seek ways to track their exit intent from community. It is easy to resort to sly forms of manipulation when we find ourselves in this place. It's tempting to twist Scripture or pull the levers of relationships to keep people doing what we'd prefer. Over time, pastoring this way makes us paranoid and controlling, always searching to mitigate against "the one that got away."

Shepherds engage in a similar sort of pursuit, but their actions flow from a very different interior place. Jesus famously said that a good shepherd would leave ninety-nine found sheep to locate the one who had gone missing. For this to be true, the shepherd must have a pulse on those pulling back or wandering off.

But the shepherd's pursuit is for *the sheep's good*, not the shepherd's.[9] Leaving ninety-nine to go after one is a terrible best practice for the shepherd looking to grow a flock, an absurd decision according to the analytics. The shepherd likely will return to the fold to find far more sheep have wandered off while they were away. Yet good shepherds know when they must put discerning distance between themselves and the rest of the

[9] This is another example where our theology leaves us prone to rationalization. It is easy to say we are doing something "for the sheep's sake," but here we are called into soul-searching, an examen of our actual motivations.

flock to provide particular tending. At a cost to themselves and the community, they temporarily offer acute care to the wandering one, motivated by love, not a lure.

Impersonal vs. Intimate

Jesus' call to fish was intended to create hatcheries, but our lesser imaginations are prone to make it about a haul. And dragging in a haul does not require any lived relationship or long-term investment. The fisher does not need to train or guide the fish; the fish simply serve as small parts of a larger purpose. The fisher can afford to be ambivalent to the fish's will and unaware of the fish's circumstances, focusing instead on the broader condition of their boat and the overall scope of their catch. Imagining an I:Thou relationship between a fisher and fish is difficult.

Fish can be caught in one fell swoop, but sheep must be tended individually. Shepherds, then, choose to inhabit (or incarnate) the circumstances and conditions of their flock. They live *with* — a life of shared seasons and sceneries, shared struggles and uncertainties. Mutually dependent on the space they share, shepherds and sheep sing praise songs in green pastures and find prayerful responses together in death valleys.

The shepherd is the leader, not merely along for the ride, so they will need to point and guide or put up fences here or there. As they journey, the shepherd learns the intimacies and intricacies of her flock — the difficult details, old wounds, headstrong tendencies, and the flock grows by particulars as the shepherd offers faithful presence to the found and the lost, the individual and the whole.

Power Over vs. Power For

The fisher stands fundamentally above the fish — larger, stronger, in control. They hold all the cards and wield all the power as they work their preferred outcome on the

unsuspecting. Shepherds also have significantly more power than sheep, yet their charge is to expend that power on the sheep's behalf. Good shepherds influence for good, nudging and pointing, but resisting the temptation to coerce. We do well to heed these words from Diane Langberg, a psychologist specializing in church-related trauma:

> We feed the sheep; we do not feed on them. Only wolves eat sheep. But you will not see wolves clearly until you tend to your own wolf-ish tendencies. The Father placed all things, meaning power, into Jesus' hands, but he put on a towel and basin and served. There was a wolf in the room that day (and note that he was undistinguishable to the other disciples). Judas was given a money bag despite being a thief — Jesus gave it to him as an invitation that Judas may see his wolfish tendencies and run to the light. Judas did not. We, in ministry, have a bag of power placed in our hands as well, and it will expose us. What will we do with it?[10]

Two Fires of Ministry Motivation

We don't want to put too fine a point on all this.

Stretch any metaphor too far and it's liable to snap back, leaving us worse for the wear. Given the complexities of real-world pastoring, an unnuanced dichotomy between fishers and shepherds proves reductionistic. I don't know any pastor who sees themselves chiefly as a fisher, who is cold-hearted toward their congregation, or who consciously sets out to manipulate or lure.

So what is the big deal?

The big deal is the little things.

My call for a new pastoral imagination is not primarily aimed at the obvious or extreme examples of pastoral infidelity we encounter in fringe circles. Rather, I hope to drive increased awareness of the mundane moments, the small situations where our ministry finds its fire in a lesser ambition.

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[10] This is my best attempt to capture the words Langberg said, which came in a training on April 13, 2023 to clergy of Churches for the Sake of Others, a diocese within the Anglican Church of North America.

Here's something I've noticed, and it has changed my day-to-day work: *Nearly every mundane ministry action can be carried out with either a fisher impulse or a shepherding impulse.* The choice often feels small in the moment, but the difference is sizable in accumulation.

I can welcome new guests to our church as either a fisher or a shepherd. I can recruit volunteers and raise funds as a fisher or a shepherd. I can craft worship liturgies, have that complex conversation, provide pastoral care, or create new programs or strategies as a fisher or a shepherd. In many cases, the surface-level actions end up looking very similar. But deep down, the motivations are fundamentally different. I find the Spirit often asking me: *Are you going to do that as a fisher or a shepherd?*

Once I started paying attention to this, I found I had a choice to make multiple times each day.[11] The invitation unfolds before me all the time and slowly is tutoring me into a more Christlike form of ministry.

Peterson, again, on a paradigm shift like this:

> A superficial observer might never detect any difference in the pastor who has made the shift… How we appear and what we do may very well continue much the same; nevertheless, everything is changed... It is the imagination that must shift, the huge interior of our lives that determines the angle and scope of our vocation.[12]

The most fundamental shift seems to be this: Leading people to respond to what God is doing in their lives, not to what is best for my ministry agenda. God is at work in people long before I meet them and long after they leave my leadership. My task is not to drive them into what I'm doing but to drive them into what God is doing, not into more church life, but more awareness of the holy encounter happening in their actual life.

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[11] Fishing and shepherding has become shorthand for our church staff, part of our common culture and shared language. We use these terms to make sense of what faithfulness requires ("What would it look like to be a shepherd in this situation?") and name when we get it wrong ("I became a fisher there for a minute!")
[12] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 222.

This often means the organization's agenda or strategy takes a back seat. But year over year, the fruit that forms is a community skilled in noticing God in their lives. *This is how we make our work pastoral at its core*, and, incidentally, I'm finding the organization ends up with whatever it truly needs anyway.

Church 1 & 2: The First and Second Task of Community

In sum, the American Church is too often hooked on its collective false self and first tasks: Comparing, competing, and catching (cleaning/keeping/consuming). When "fishing for men and women" forgets its holy underpinnings, any bait or hook will do. And so a church caught in its first task will tend to value and reproduce:

- One-size-fits-all programs over slow, relational presence.
- Growing metrics over growing maturity.
- External "holiness" over inner hospitality.
- Pastoral control and coercion over pastoral courage and care.

At its least-developed levels, a church in this stage is prone to mistake mystery, suffering, and "others" as threats, so the doors are always revolving to export those elsewhere.

But as churches keep following Jesus through loss and renewal, they will find their motivations undressed and purified. In time, they discover the "task within the task" that their community has always been about.[13]

"What is a normal goal to a young person," Jung says, "becomes a neurotic hindrance in old age."[14]

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[13] Rohr, *Falling Upward*, 17. Rohr expounds further on pg. 240: "It is when we begin to pay attention and seek integrity precisely in the task within the task that we begin to move from the first to the second half of our own lives. Integrity largely has to do with purifying our intentions and a growing honesty about our actual motives. It is hard work. Most often we don't pay attention to that inner task until we have had some kind of fall or failure in our outer tasks."

[14] C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2014), 399. Quoted by Rohr in *Falling Upward,* xiii.

Perhaps we could riff: What is a normal goal for a fishing church becomes a neurotic hindrance as they mature into a community of sheep and shepherds. And so churches following Jesus from the second fire are learning to:

- Name and grieve misplaced communal expectations and arguments.
- Embrace struggle, monotony, and mystery as ordinary parts of a long life together.
- Find renewed value and vitality in classical traditions and spiritual care.
- Value humility and discernment as first-order work in organizational leadership.

All this brings us back to where we began: The faultlines running beneath the Church and the rubble caused by them. How can we become shepherds living into the final part of the great storyline — *wholeness* — that the Church might be put back together again?

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shows us how.

#14

A New Form

PASTORAL POSTURE AND PRACTICE

Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds
so that you can figure out what God's will is—
what is good and pleasing and mature.

ROMANS 12:2

We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning;
for what was great in the morning will be of little importance in the evening,
and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie.

CARL JUNG

The word "pastor" finds its etymological roots in another word: Shepherd.

Since the Pentateuch, there has been consistent imagination for a shepherd-leader who would care for God's flock with God's heart and posture.[1]

The Chief Shepherd, of course, has always been God — *the Lord is my Shepherd.* The prophetic tradition later affirmed this theology: "Like a shepherd, he tends his flock; he gathers up the lambs with his arm; he carries them close to his heart."[2]

Soon, the prophets offered the metaphor, on loan, to God's ministry leaders, though there often proved a heartbreaking disconnect between God's way of shepherding and theirs.[3] Much later, New Testament writers extended the image to the leaders of Jesus' Church in embryo.[4] Ultimately, the clarion voice for Christ-shaped churches to be tended by shepherds belonged to Peter himself:

> Like shepherds, tend the flock of God among you. Watch over it. Don't shepherd because you must, but do it voluntarily for God. Don't shepherd greedily, but do it eagerly. Don't shepherd by ruling over those entrusted to your care, but become examples to the flock.[5]

Peter could write these words because he had lived them — the shepherd metaphor had become the largest invitation of his life. It was the final imagination Jesus gave Peter for pastoring because it purified and sustained the other images he had held.[6] Shepherding called Peter into vocational focus, vocational fidelity — and toward a vocational finish line.

Needless to say, the pastoral metaphor has much deeper roots in Scripture and tradition than the fishing metaphor. But in our day, we tend to lead the organizational

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[1] Numbers 27:17.
[2] Isaiah 40:11 (NET).
[3] Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Ezekiel 34 carry two of the sharpest critiques: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherd-leaders of Israel… Doom to you shepherds of Israel, feeding your own mouths! Aren't shepherds supposed to feed sheep?" Ezekiel 34:1-2 (MSG).
[4] Ephesians 4:11, among others.
[5] 1 Peter 5:2-3 (CEB).
[6] Shepherding protected the "fishing" metaphor from unbaptized expressions that would lead to coercive leadership. Shepherding oriented his "rock" metaphor so it would not lead to the undiscerning building of babel-towers.

realities of church like fishers and sequester shepherding into a small corner of our pastoral work. We use shepherding as an umbrella term for things like pastoral visits or perhaps eldership, reducing it to one of many hats we put on and then take off. I wonder now if a reclamation of the shepherding metaphor would do wonders to heal our divides and lead God's people into deeper wholeness.

I Am the Good Shepherd

The sequence of Peter's story shows that we begin in ministry amazed that Jesus sees something in us, but we end in ministry amazed at what we see in him. It is to Jesus, then, we ultimately look, that we might find imagination and imitation of his pastoral posture and practice.

In John 10, Jesus gives his pastoral theology, his manifesto of what it means to be a shepherd.[7] He distinguishes two types of pasture-leaders: "Good shepherds" and "hired hands." For the remainder of this chapter, we'll note the differences between the two, asking what essential conversions must be formed in us to move from hired hands to good shepherds. We'll find that each conversion, each shift, helps to heal the breach of a specific faultline named in Chapter One, and for each, we'll offer an example of how we can reclaim classical pastoral practice in our daily work.

Pastoral Cruciformity: From Control to Surrender

Bringing Wholeness to Impoverished Theology (Faultline #1)

The first step toward healing any distorted theology is to learn from Jesus. To the degree the pastor patterns his work after the Good Shepherd, "there is hope for the church of the twenty-first century."[8]

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[7] The words of Jesus in italics throughout this chapter all are found in John 10.
[8] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 52

"I am the gate for the sheep."

Soon, Jesus will self-identify as shepherd, but at the start of the passage, he is the gate. We see at the outset that all true ministry passes through and is shaped by our encounter with Jesus, the gate. The gate of Christ must be cross-shaped, so to pass through it, we will need to increasingly conform to the posture of the cruciform God, leaving behind whatever we carry that does not fit that shape.[9]

One day, I picked up my journal and sketched a small door, then behind it, a much larger door. I labeled the first door "my shepherd door" and the second "The Good Shepherd's door." It was my way of getting at a question: How do I adapt and align my little shepherd gate to the greater gate of Christ, such that when people pass into my shepherd-leadership, they are well-aligned to continue into Jesus' shepherd-leadership?

"Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."

These words have begun to birth in me a new relaxation around ministry. They give me permission to let go of needing to keep people in my church forever. While I hope to cultivate a sustainable community of long-lasting relationships, I never know when the Good Shepherd may lead someone *in* or *out* of my little pasture to follow Jesus further. I am slowly learning to trust that the same Master Shepherd who led people into my pastoral care in the first place will journey with them after they leave.

"I am the Good Shepherd."

Jesus switches gears, becoming the ultimate shepherd who is contrasted with the ultimate hired hand ("the Thief"). The implications for ministry extend to us:

> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy… I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the

[9] In Revelation 21:21, the gates of the New Jersualem are made of pearl. A pearl is formed when an oyster is exposed to irritant and contaminant and undergoes tremendous suffering, yet emerges beautiful. This is a picture of the cross — a hint, I believe, to the shape of the gate we must conform to in order to enter Jesus' new heavens and earth. It follows that Jesus, who was cruciform from the foundation of the earth (Rev. 13:8), was also a cross-shaped gate in this parable.

> sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd… And I lay down my life for the sheep… I lay down my life in order to take it up again… I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.[10]

The hired hand looks and acts like a shepherd as long as it is advantageous. But at the end of the day, the hired hand wants to stay alive. This is problematic, for the Good Shepherd tells us that shepherds ultimately die, so to speak, in the course of doing the work.

I've observed an unspoken narrative at work in many churches: We must keep the church alive at all costs. Churches that are dying refuse to pass their resources along to a fresh expression because of this narrative; churches that are called to take risks end up playing things safe because of it.

There is a scene in my favorite show, *The West Wing.* A candidate running for office dies just weeks before the election, leaving only one living candidate in the race. But the deceased candidate's campaign manager, Will Bailey, refuses to pack it in, insisting the campaign of ideas remains very much alive. A reporter, listening to his plan to get a dead man elected, finally puts it to him straight: "We're all sitting here pretending this is a normal press conference — but your candidate died, so isn't this all a little preposterous?"

Bailey doesn't miss a beat. He describes the opponent, the one still living, as a seven-term corrupt congressman who has taken money from companies he regulates, has made it easier for guns to be bought and sold on the street, and has joined protests designed to frighten pregnant women.

"What's your point?" the reporter asks.

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[10] John 10:10-18.

Bailey gets the last word: "There are worse things in the world than no longer being alive."[11]

Until pastors come to grips with the reality that Jesus calls our churches to faithfulness, not survival, we cannot follow the Good Shepherd's cruciform example. Institutionalism resists it (which leads to things worse than no longer being alive), but there are times we are invited to not survive on purpose, choosing instead to follow Jesus or protect the sheep. Kris McDaniel observes, "At the end of the Good Shepherd story, there's a dead wolf and a dead shepherd, but living sheep." [12]

We can only receive this if we take Jesus' power seriously, for the same Good Shepherd who invites us into a ministry of death and resurrection has the power to take life back up again. The Good Shepherd knows how to live on the other side of dying.

***Reclaiming Pastoral Practice:** Open-Handed Discernment as Ministry's First Posture*

If we get our "who am I" questions right, Rohr says, our "what should I do" questions will take care of themselves.[13] Now that we are firmly anchored in our identity as shepherd-leaders, we trust we will find clarity for the more practical matters of our daily work, the "what should I do" questions.

We look to our former toolkits and tackle boxes and find well-worn bait and other best practices that no longer belong. We wonder, how can I beat these old swords into new plowshares, new practices congruent with the cruciform posture of Jesus?

We begin with that posture itself. If we pastors can learn to do our work with open hands, humbly releasing and receiving at the same time, we'll be well on our way.

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[11] Alex Graves, dir. "Game On." *The West Wing*, season 4, episode 6, Warner Bros., 2002.
[12] Kris McDaniel. "Jesus Is a Good Shepherd. I Am a Fragile (and Stubborn!) Lamb." *Renewing the Center,* January 20, 2021. Podcast, website, 5:32. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/renewing-the-center/id1528904528?i=1000505898104.
[13] Rohr, *Falling Upward,* 5.

Discernment is a word we typically confine to the category of prayer, but we can claim it as a posture with which we do both practical and prayerful work. We need to discern our administrative tasks as much as our sacred ones. We are invited to consider instead how we can show up to our Sunday work and our office work, our prayer meetings and our board meetings, with the same ear for the Spirit. As we mature, we find reactivity yielding to reflection, arguments submitting to awe, and drivenness submitting to patient discernment.

Pastoral Character: From Proficiency to Wisdom

Bringing Wholeness to Immature Leadership (Faultline #2)

Jesus continues:

"He calls his sheep by name and leads them. The sheep follow because they know his voice."

It is not primarily from the credentials of experience or expertise that we lead, but from the context of relationship. Good shepherds carry the personal names and stories of their sheep, and the sheep have enough relationship with the shepherd that they know the shepherd by voice alone.

Contemporary church leadership tends to emphasize the development of platforms, programs, and proficiencies (*pro* – forward; *facere* – to do or make). We think our skill will move ministry forward; our doing and making will make the difference. But the sheep aren't moved, at least in the ways that ultimately matter, until they are known.

Suttle argues that today's pastors must exchange our emphasis on technique for a renewed emphasis on virtues: "The church doesn't need technically proficient leaders, the

church needs virtuous leaders. Techniques are built for the short run... Virtues are built for the long haul."[14]

How can we make this switch? We start by reclaiming more ancient understandings of our role so we will be less confused about our part to play. Peterson, again:

> I can demonstrate acceptable competence in the skills I have been taught, but am I a pastor? I function adequately in a variety of dovetailed roles, but is there a biblical foundation providing solid, authoritative underpinning for what I am doing so that my daily work is congruent with the ancient ministries of prophet, priest, and wise man to which I am heir?[15]

Reclaiming Pastoral Practice: *Pastor / Prophet / Priest*

Across Scripture, ministry leaders serve three primary tasks: Priest, prophet, and pastor. As priests, we mediate between God and God's people, developing the sacramental imaginations required to displace vain imaginations. As prophets, we point toward God's way and our waywardness, perhaps setting out a loving stumbling stone so our people might wrestle with what faithfulness requires. As pastors, we offer wise, winsome presence and faithful, relational leadership.

Recently, I was in a pastoral care conversation with a parishioner working through a struggle. During our conversation, I found myself leaning into all three roles. There was an element where what was being shared was confessional, and I needed to speak a priestly assurance. Also, there was an invitation for the individual to follow Jesus in a particular way, and I needed to prophetically encourage them toward trusting response. And there was an element of pastoral care called for, as the topic at hand intersected larger, more thorny stories this person was carrying. Learning the language of these roles

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[14] Suttle, *Shrink*, 125.
[15] Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones*, Kindle, loc. 70.

keeps us centered as shepherd-leaders, it helps us hold to our true work amidst the dizzying distractions all around.

Pastoral Clarity: From Attractional to Formational

Bringing Wholeness to Impatient Churches (Faultline #3)

When churches are impatient to make an impact, the search for shortcuts begins. We look to make a splash, expand overnight, or turn stones to bread. These aren't bad things; we just have to hop some fences to make them happen.

"Anyone who does not enter by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief."

Jesus reminds us that there is only one path into real pasture — trying to get good pastoral work done "by another way" robs essential elements from the process. Guiding a community into Christ's way requires intentionality and appropriate slowness, though not apathy. We want to be sure we won't skip over the pace or priorities of the Shepherd.

Just as there are fishers and shepherds, there are fish and sheep. Some in our congregations are less interested in truly being shepherded; they want to be hooked and entertained. These folks tend to make their desires known, and if we're not careful, we expend significant energy to satisfy them.

Our congregations spend most of their time under other influences — corporate values, the speed of social media, and the urge to keep up with the Joneses all around. Quite naturally, they assume these priorities can be ported onto our spiritual journey, our church community. In the face of this, it is the pastor's responsibility to set the pace, to repudiate shortcuts and spectacles, to gently point to a bigger story than our urgent needs.

We need pastoral clarity, a sense of humble resolve about how spiritual formation is truly fostered. The right path is not always the most pragmatic or expedient, and God's agenda is not always a salve for our surface-level struggle. It is our job as pastors to bear

witness to deeper values, forming our communities to love long-term faithfulness over adrenaline hits and quick fixes.

***Reclaiming Pastoral Practice:** House Churches*

One way we're trying to get at this in my congregation is through House Churches, a practice reaching back to the example of the Acts community. Once a month, we stop our regular worship gatherings and meet in midsized communities hosted in homes and led by lay people. We break from a curated service and move into simpler rhythms of prayer, food, and Communion.

We do this for many reasons, but two rise to the surface. First, switching our form of church in this way drives us to meet God in the ordinary, not just the "heavenly." There's nothing flashy about sitting on someone's living room floor as kids do crafts on the coffee table, but it helps us learn to notice God formationally at work amid the mundane. Often, these gatherings are a mixture of awesome and awkward, community and chaos. Which means they are a lot like life.

Further, House Churches are an attempt to keep our values consistent, even as other things change. Our church recently experienced surprising numeric growth (which has challenged my thinking on much of this project), and we've had to wrestle with how to prioritize our first value — presence — in a community that is now too large for a few staff members to care for. House Church allows the whole community to get in on the shepherding (we call our House Church leaders "shepherds") and creates practical opportunities for others to lead from their ministry gifts. It helps us prioritize presence, even as the community grows.

House Church gets mixed reviews from our people. It's messy and cumbersome to manage. Many would prefer to stick to our usual church gathering instead. Still, I'm

resolute about it in this season. I think it helps our church be formed in faithfulness, so we're owning the awkward and messy, trusting Jesus will slip in amidst our shared meal.

Pastoral Company: From Vision to Direction

Bringing Wholeness to Impersonal Ministry (Faultline #4)

"They will not follow a stranger — they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

Keeping company with Jesus and his people is at the heart of the pastoral life. But we've done strange things to the word *company*. It used to mean, literally, "bread with."[16] My company was my breadsmen— those I shared meals and wine and coffees with. These days, growing a company means something completely different, something corporate.[17] It seems this shift has infiltrated the church as well.

As pastors, our fundamental task is not to be visionary-leaders, but shepherd-leaders. Vision is certainly not a bad word in the vocabulary of pastoral leadership — it's just that the only way to see what others can't yet see is to get way out in front of them. Being a visionary requires us to put distance between ourselves and our people. We have to chart the path sometimes, but then we need to return to the fields to share bread with our people. Pastoral leadership simply can't be done from far off, from corporate headquarters.

If we replace "vision" with "direction," we find we can still use our voice but do so in closer proximity. We still point and guide, still counsel and course-correct — but we do so alongside others. We become familiar with the names and histories of our breadsman,

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[16] In Latin, *cum* (with), *panis* (bread).

[17] The assumption was that as we share bread together, we'll eventually put our heads together and try to do or build something in the world. This led to the way we "start companies" today, and it holds a clue for how leadership can be redeemed. If we can lead our organizations from the overflow of "bread with," we can recover the heart of our work while continuing to build the work itself. For a deep dive on the etymological journey of "company", see John H. McWhorter, "Parting Company." *Lexicon Valley*, March 2, 2021, Podcast, https://slate.com/podcasts/lexicon-valley/2021/03/history-etymology-company.

leading in the light of what God is doing in their lives. In this way, our work flows from the pastoral tradition of spiritual directors, not the business tradition of corporate directors.

Reclaiming Pastoral Practice: The Cure of Souls

I see this work of pastoral company taking on three primary postures: *pastoral care*, *pastoral courage*, and *pastoral co-suffering*.

Pastoral Care

How can we deepen our congregation's imagination for pastoral care in an era where our work is so misunderstood and listening attention so outsourced?[18] It is only possible insofar as we join a great tradition of pastors who have understood their first work to be the ministry of presence, the cure of souls, the "art of arts."[19]

The wisdom tradition helps us prioritize our responsibilities: "Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds."[20] Significant parts of our pastoral task will be left undone so long as we prioritize strategy-work and stage-work over soul-work and story-work. Nouwen's words resonate as we learn to become shepherds:

> More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps... It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops... It is difficult not to have plans... But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to

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[18] Richard Baxter, the seventeenth-century reformed pastor, had his clerk schedule in-person meetings with every parishioner each year, seeing that each was known so each would know they were seen (see Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2020].) We are working on something like this in our church, blending the classical practices of a rule of life with the modern jargon of church membership. The question is this: How can we make membership more about a shared commitment to be present to one another and less about a commitment to church involvement?

[19] Gregory the Great used the phrase "art of arts" to describe the beauty and complexity of pastoral practice in his famous pastoral rule. See St. Gregory (The Great), *The Book of Pastoral Rule* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 14.

[20] Proverbs 27:23.

> listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them.

Pastoral Courage

Holistic shepherding ministry is not only hugs and handshakes, though. Sheep possess a mob instinct; they are stubborn and slow.[21] They need love — and they need cruciform leadership.

It is not always our job to speak a comfortable word. Some things ought not to be made comfortable. And so pastoral courage is needed right alongside pastoral comfort. I am slowly learning that, at times, the best way I can foster healing is through hard, honest words, a wisdom rooted in shalom, not soothe-saying.

Pastoral Co-Suffering

I have found it difficult to trust pastors who can't identify with the struggles of others. We cannot tend if we are not tender, so the crust of our lives must be broken open before we have any bread to offer others.

Pastors minister from the overflow of their experience as ones blessed, broken, and given; their own stories of belovedness, wilderness, and wholeness.

A Pastoral Story as Large as Life

In the end, then, we journey with others while on the great journey ourselves.

So often, I find myself pursuing a flatline life — a life of self-assured steadiness, flawless faithfulness and predictable progress.

That's a good thing.

It's just not a great story.

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[21] McDaniel, *Jesus Is a Good Shepherd*, 3:06.

Then, I remember my friend Peter — how wholeheartedly he loved, how wildly he risked, how often he blundered, how deeply he failed.

And how he was forgiven, made whole, called again.

It's not that we go looking for the wild in life. All life's wilderness comes looking for us. So, in the course of the pastoral journey, we will be hurt, we will hurt others, we will act out of character, we will need to be saved.

The Word still writes stories as large as life — stories of belovedness, wilderness, forgiveness, and wholeness.

All along the way, we are becoming shepherds.

Good Shepherd,

call and commission us, confront and confound us.

Teach us the downward path of rising again.

When our hearts break, when we weep bitterly, when we shatter the storyline —

restore and restory us.

Meet us at a second fire with bread and wine.

Recall the calling you have for us. Renew our imaginations again.

For love of you, we take on your pastoral posture in the world,

participating in the divine nature.

We hear your call to follow further, and say yes —

walking deeper and deeper into the world, growing older.

Author and Finisher, write our lives and bring us home.

Amen.

EPILOGUE

Iona

Some day,

after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity,

we shall harness for God the energies of love,

then for a second time in the history of the world,

we will have discovered fire.

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

There are, they say, more sheep than people inhabiting the Isle of Iona.

I hadn't considered how appropriate that setting would be for this project until I was there, still early in the writing. Every path and yard and unclaimed hill is filled with sheep. They are hemmed in only by the ocean at the Isle's four edges. They wander from pasture to pasture, up and down valleys, even onto the beaches.

On my last day in Iona, I took a long walk. I experienced the island as a thin-space, as lore said it would be, but a thin-space in both directions. My five days there had been marked by encounter with light, but also the assailing of a dark shame, and I felt young there for reasons I don't fully understand.

I stood on the Bay at the Back of the Ocean, remembering my early stories, asking Christ to make midrash on my memories as he did on Peter's. I needed another fire. I needed to be restoried. I stayed at the beach for hours, and by the time I started back to the hotel, the sun was setting. And the sheep had moved in.

I came over a hill, and there they were, hundreds of them, dots of off-white grazing on a green that stretched as far as I could see. As I came closer, the dots grew shapes and faces. Some were irritable, others were young and tender, mere lambs.

At one point, forty or so sheep assembled, entirely blocking the path I needed to get back home. I didn't know what to do. As they grew increasingly aware of my presence, several became threatened — defensive, with heels dug in. I had walked beyond enough sheep now that I was fully encircled, unsure how to keep company with them, unsure how to move on.

Then, all of a sudden, it hit me, and I smiled.

"Don't worry," I said softly to my congregation of sheep. "I'm a shepherd."

And I walked right through.

CITATIONS *for* INTRODUCTORY QUOTES & POEMS

Prologue: 2 Peter 1:1-4 (The Message, NRSV).

Journey : St. Brendan the Navigator, "A Prayer of St Brendan the Navigator," Grace Upon Grace, March 18, 2022, https://graceupongrace.org.uk/a-prayer-of-st-brendan-the-navigator/.

Faultlines: Matthew 16:18 (NRSV).

Shorelines & Storylines: Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 281. Quoting Wallace Stegner, *When the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* (New York: Random House, 1992), 181.

"A Sunset at Sea": Poem by Jordan Warner

Commission: John 21:18 (MSG and NLT).

Commission: Laura Clawson, "You Know, Getting Older..." September 14, 2023, https://twitter.com/lovingtoknow/status/1702305301649645925?s=46.

Ambition (1): Taylor Goldsmith / Dawes, "Time Flies Either Way." Track 10 on Passwords. HUB 2018, Spotify audio.

Ambition (2): Matthew 16:18 (NLT).

Confrontation (1): William C. Martin, *The Art of Pastoring Contemplative Reflections*. Pittsburgh: Vital Faith Resources, 1994, 39.

Confrontation (2): Dom Mauro Giuseppe Lepori, *Simon Called Peter: In the Footsteps of a Man Following God*. First Edition. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010, 14.

Reversion: Josh Ritter, "Change of Time." Track 2 on So Runs The World Away. Pytheas 2010, Spotify audio.

"Halfdome": Poem by Jordan Warner

Conversion: Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994, 376.

Confession: Luci Shaw. "Judas, Peter." *Polishing the Petoskey Stone*, Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003, 201.

Participation (1): Ken Untener. "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own." October 25, 1979, https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prophets-of-a-future-not-our-own.

Participation (2): 2 Peter 1:1-4 (The Message and NRSV).

Co-Mission (1): Eugene Peterson. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 156.

Co-Mission (2): John 20:21, paraphrased.

Imitation (1): Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World.* Faith Press, 1977, 17.

Imitation (2): St. John of the Cross. *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Somerville: Bottom of the Hill Publishing, 2012, 136.

Imagination (1): Ezekiel 11:19(a) and 36:26(b) (NIV and NRSV).

Imagination (2): Eugene Peterson. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 222.

A New Fire (1): W. Paul Jones, *A Season in the Desert: Making Time Holy* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2000), 86.

A New Fire (2): Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2013), 17.

A New Form (1): Romans 12:2 (CEB).

A New Form (2): C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2014), 399.

Epilogue: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2002), 86-87.

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