

**A Wellness Focus in 2020:  
The Inner Life of the Pastor  
Dr. Rod Wilson  
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**A. Neglecting the Inner Life**

***As Pastors, we often focus inappropriately on...***

***— a. what is happening around us and to us, rather than what is happening in us.***

-framing pastoral life with *around, to, and in us*

-around us? global pandemic, US election, racism-bigotry-hatred, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ rights, moral relativism, attitudes toward institutional faith

-invitation to teach and preach, disciple and encourage, provide hope and perspective

-to us? criticisms and concerns, misunderstanding, ‘camps’ on issues, questioning our authority, leavers and threatening to leave, by what authority and who gave you this authority?, marriage and family challenges

-invitation to clarify our call generally and specifically, examine and modify strategy, read leadership books, attend conferences, manage priorities, consider other professions

-in us? hardest question to answer and one most infrequently asked- how are you? how is what is happening around you and to you impacting you? how are you doing on the inside? not asked often and I would prefer not to answer it even on my own!!

-invitation to not focus only on the church’s story (community), other peoples’ story (biography), God’s story (theology), but our own story (autobiography)

... [with apologies for the lack of inclusive language] our fragmented life experiences combined with our sense of urgency do not allow for a “handbook for ministers”...After all attempts to articulate the predicament of modern man, the necessity to articulate the predicament of the minister himself became most important. For the minister is called to recognize the sufferings of his time in his own heart and make that recognition the starting point of his service. Whether he tries to enter into a dislocated world, relate to a convulsive generation, or speak to a dying man, his service will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which he speaks. (Nouwen, H. *The Wounded Healer*. xvi)

***— b. performance and the imperative, rather than on identity and the indicative.***

-mood of verb? relationship of the verb’s action to reality

-indicative- mood of certainty and actuality

-Denis Federau is a fine person.

-imperative- mood of command

-You should take Denis out for an expensive dinner.

-approach to biblical canon's mood typically shows up in three types of churches

- only understand indicative > foundation but no house
- only hear imperatives > hyperactivity with no foundation
- recognize imperatives are built on indicatives > being precedes doing

-Romans 1-11 vs. 12-16?

-intelligent reading of first 11 chapters of Romans- indicative mood

-mercy, salvation, sin, justification, Israel, Jesus = who God is and who I am

-“Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy” (12:1)

-imperative powerful not just in itself alone but because built on the indicative

-many would prefer to ignore and jump to ethical statements of 12-16

-OT, Ephesians, Colossians

-crucial to determine the chronology of identity, performance and acceptance

-grace is the major ingredient in the identity pie

-grace = perform because you are accepted

-emotional bondage = perform in order to be accepted

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (I Cor. 15:9-10)

-pastoral identity rooted in God precedes, undergirds and inspires doing

-understanding the difference between cut flowers and flowers in a pot

### — ***c. shame and hiding, rather than on transparency and authenticity.***

-Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (2:25)

-fig leaves covered their shame with each other; trees covered it with God

-leaves and trees helped them hide from themselves?

-shame and hiding are in our DNA and are theologically framed

-the biggest cosmic question: where are you? (Genesis 3:9)

Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. (Brene Brown. The Gifts of Imperfection, 39)

Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are. (50)

-guilt- I did something bad/wrong vs. shame- I am bad/wrong

-pastors can easily feel shame and hide behind legitimate activities like preaching, prayer, leadership, etc.

-transparency and authenticity not just about response to others but also self

## Reflection and Interaction

Reflect on these three statements and your own pastoral ministry, and assess how you are doing right now on each of them by putting a letter on the line in front of each point (G- Good; F- Fair; P- Poor). Share your assessment in your breakout group and discuss your results.

After the session have three conversations with your spouse/family member, a colleague in your ministry, and a friend. Give each of them a brief summary of this session, ask them to tell you how they would rate you on these three factors, and then discuss their assessment alongside your own.

### B. Navigating the Inner Life

***As Pastors, we need to focus intentionally on***

— ***a. who we really are.***

-multiple contemporary lies in the culture and the church on who we are as pastors  
-flesh- unspiritual/spiritual; material and physical; human

God remembers we are flesh (Psalm 78:39)

-sin's influence on image of God? marred, impacted, distorted, tainted, relic  
-all pastors are fallen image bearers  
-total depravity- everything impacted but not totally

-intoxication and allure of being a strong leader/Pastor in the face of the when-then

That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (II Cor. 12:9-10)

-who are we? weak and wounded, fallen image bearers, not the perfect Creator

— ***b. contemplative prayer.***

-adapted from Thomas Keating. Invitation to Love.

-biography- misunderstood > not loved and valued > feel rejected and experience shame  
-significant problem in pastoral ministry and leadership  
-my ache is about rejection but very little to do with the other person or the church  
-contemplative prayer- silent and reflective awareness of God's grace  
-recognition that biography and theology are always in dialogue  
-what happens in me more important than what happens to me  
-my problems are usually not interpersonal but intrapersonal  
-Christ's love for me is not dependent on whether I am understood or misunderstood  
-I am loved, secure, and significant whatever I do and perceived threats are not real  
-relational conflict has potential to be spiritually self-educative in contemplative prayer

— ***c. what and who we are responsible for.***

- reflect on the organization/church you lead and the people that are involved
- to what degree do you feel responsible for them versus responsible to them?
- being responsible for others gives us a sense that our ministry to them is all about what we are doing, how we are behaving, and what we might accomplish to ensure their success
- challenging posture because we cannot control the outcome so cannot work toward their success
- being responsible to others give us a sense that our ministry to them is all about what they are doing, how they are behaving, and what they might accomplish to ensure their success
- not as challenging because, under God, we are doing pastoral work recognizing that God is responsible for others and their well-being
  
- before God I am ultimately responsible for being attentive to my inner life
- that is where I need to do the work and expend the effort
- everything else is a manifestation of that attentiveness

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Use Bonhoeffer's poem on the next page, as a focus for contemplative prayer.

### Who Am I?

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would step from my cell's confinement  
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would talk to my warders  
freely and friendly and clearly,  
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I would bear the days of misfortune  
equably, smilingly, proudly,  
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I know of myself,  
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,  
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,  
tossing in expectation of great events,  
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,  
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
faint and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?  
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?  
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?  
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,  
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.  
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

(Eberhard Bethge, *Costly Grace: An Illustrated Biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. 1980)