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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

March 2, 2014

### When We Are Discouraged

*“But we have received this treasure in clay pots so that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn’t come from us. We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren’t crushed. We are confused, but we aren’t depressed. We are harassed, but we aren’t abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren’t knocked out.”*  
2 Corinthians 4:7-9 (Common English Bible)

The primary responsibility for pastors is to equip church members for the work of ministry. This is the unambiguous job description for pastors given in Ephesians 4:11-13. This challenges some of the traditional roles customarily assigned to pastors by their congregations. One role, pastoral care, has consumed pastors diminishing their capacity for faithfully fulfilling God’s expectation for them – building disciples and equipping them for the ministry of the church. This is the conclusion of Greg Ogden, a national authority for building effective and vital congregations. Ogden continues that there is nothing wrong with a church calling an associate pastor whose primary responsibility is pastoral care. But there are two caveats: even the associate pastor charged with pastoral care has the responsibility of equipping church members to share in the caring ministry of the church, and second, the congregation must not now assume they have two pastors whose primary responsibility is pastoral care. This reduces ministry to chaplaincy rather than a movement for advancing God’s purposes in the community.

The common difficulty that many pastors face is that numerous congregations have lost a vision for what God seeks to accomplish through them. The tragic result is that those congregations become consumers of religious services such as pastoral care. If there is any energy left-over in the pastor then she or he is free to do “those other things” like disciple-forming, equipping members for ministry and leadership development. Violate the expectations of church members and the result is exactly what the above sentences speak of: “all kinds of trouble, confusion, harassment and being knocked down.”

We all have experienced these hardships. Parents hear their children muttering that other parents are more lenient and reasonable. Friendships are tested when another seeks to manipulate for selfish purposes. Colleagues in the workplace betray you if the betrayal advances them in the organization. Not one of us is a stranger to “all kinds of trouble” that the Apostle Paul speaks of here. The good news is that in such difficulty we need only to remember that we possess a treasure – Jesus Christ. He is the reason that when trouble presses, we aren’t crushed. When we are confused, we are not depressed. When we are harassed, we are not abandoned. And when we are knocked down, we are not knocked out.

Perhaps today you are bracing yourself for some inevitable blow from someone who is disappointed in you. Perhaps blows have already been received and you are simply trying to find your way forward once again. The Apostle Paul asks that we recognize that Jesus is very present and will sustain us by His strength as we steady ourselves and move positively into the future.

*Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the treasure of Jesus Christ. Steady us in our weakness that we may not remain knocked down when life presses but stand again and walk confidently according to Your purposes for us this day. Amen.*

Doug Hood