



Peace in the Perfect Storm

Peace in the Perfect Storm

By Rev. Jim Rose, Director

Fortress Institute for Stress and Anxiety

Things You Need to Know about Clergy Stress and Trauma

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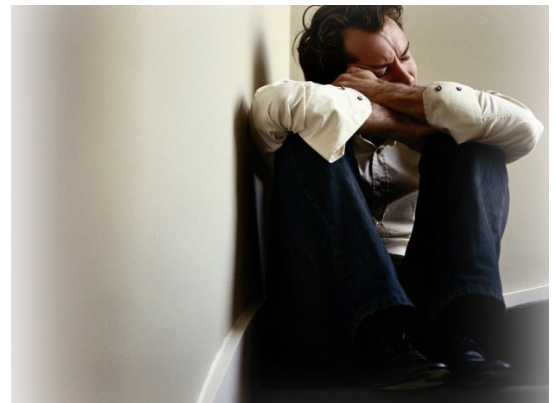
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Foreword

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Thornton Wilder wrote a one act play titled, *The Angel That Troubled the Waters*** It was a fictional story based on the biblical account in John 5:1-4 of the Pool of Bethesda. In the story, a medical doctor comes to the pool of Bethesda, hoping to be the first in the pool where he is confident he will find healing for the afflictions of his own soul. Of course many others are gathered there also—the blind, the lame, the dying. They too hope to be first in. Suddenly, the angel appears and troubles the water. This is the signal they have all waited for. The multitude begins

crowding to be first in the water. The doctor too attempts to push his way forward. Yet, just as he prepares to put his foot in the water, the angel appears, blocking his path:

Angel: Draw back, Physician, this moment is not for you.

Physician: Angelic Visitor, I pray thee, listen to my prayer.

Angel: Healing is not for you.

Physician: Surely, surely, the angels are wise. Surely, O Prince, you are not deceived by my apparent wholeness. Your eyes can see the nets in which my wings are caught; the sin into which all my endeavors sink half-performed cannot be concealed from you.

Angel: I know.

Physician: Oh, in such an hour was I born, and doubly fearful to me is the flaw in my heart. Must I drag my shame, Prince and Singer, all my days more bowed than my neighbor?

Angel: Without your wound where would your power be? It is your very remorse that makes your low voice tremble into the hearts of men. The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children on earth as can one human being broken on the wheels of living. In Love's service only the wounded soldiers can serve. Draw back.

**Thornton Wilder, *The Angel That Troubled the Waters, and Other Plays* [New York: Coward-McCann, 1928], pp. 147 ff.

Foreword

Foreword

“Without your wound, where would your power be?” The words read so easy on the page but the truth is more painful than words can bear. Yet it is true: “In Love’s service (God’s service), only the wounded can serve.” Though pastors, missionaries and other professionals in ministry have a variety of reasons they choose that path, ultimately, their desire is to serve. How devastating it is when they begin to realize that not everyone appreciates their service; how shocking when their sacrifice seems never enough. The resulting stress, anxiety and even trauma can leave deep wounds and scars on a minister’s soul that are carried for a lifetime.

For what purpose? Maybe you or someone you love is wondering that right now? Is it really worth the pain? The cost of service is so great, and the rewards seem so small. Why continue to make them?

The booklet before you is a token of hope that it really is worth it all.

My name is Jim Rose. I’m an ordained minister, licensed counselor and director of the *Fortress Institute for Stress and Anxiety*, an agency devoted to providing practical, Christian solutions for the greatest problems in life. In addition to my credentials as a minister, counselor and director, I am also a wounded healer. As you will find out in the pages that follow, I too have been to the “Pool of Bethesda.” I’ve begged the angel of God to deliver me from my afflictions.

He has. But not as I would have expected. I too am learning the lesson of the wounded physician in Wilder’s piece: that In God’s service only the wounded can serve. As you read the material that follows, I hope you will keep that in mind. The trouble, pain, sacrifice and conflict can be worth it all. But only when we realize its larger purpose in our life.



Jim Rose, Director
Fortress Institute for Stress and Anxiety

Chapter 1

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In September of 1991, the 70 foot fishing vessel, *Andrea Gail*, weighed anchor at Gloucester. Her destination was the Grand Banks. For over a month, the *Andrea Gail* did her work until, on October 28, the captain decided it was time to head home. But the weather forecasts were not good. A once in a lifetime conflagration of storms produced 100 foot waves and 80 knot wind speeds. The last recorded words from the captain were, "She's comin' boys, and she's comin' on strong!" Despite a huge search and rescue operation by both US and Canadian Coast Guards, they never found the *Andrea Gail*. They never found the crew. They were swallowed up by what came to be known as a "perfect storm."

Maybe you remember the Hollywood version of this story. It came out in 1997. It was then most of us learned about these rare meteorological events in which multiple storm fronts converge. The individual storms themselves would be bad enough. But when they become aligned at the same moment in time, the devastating effects are multiplied. It is then there is a "perfect storm."



When I interact with clergy from a variety of educational, denominational and cultural situations, I find many that are facing their own "perfect storm." I call it the "perfect storm" of clergy stress and trauma. They are the faces and tears behind the tragic statistics**:

*Clergy have the second highest divorce rate among all professions.
70 percent do not have someone they consider a close friend.
50 percent feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
45 percent of pastors say that they've experienced depression or burnout.
40 percent report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
Over 1600 protestant ministers in the United States are forced out of their positions each month.
Nearly 1 in 4 ministers experience a forced termination at least once during their ministry.
Only 54% go back into full-time church related positions*

****Source:** <http://mtmfoundation.org/>

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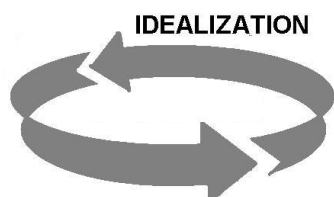
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Like the fishermen on the *Andrea Gail*, clergy today are vulnerable to a powerful conflagration of storm fronts in three areas:

Storm Front #1: Clergy Idealization

Most clergy enter the ministry because of a high sense of calling and purpose. They want to help people. They desire to make an impact on the world. Above all they want to serve God and His kingdom. It is no exaggeration to state that most clergy begin their career with lofty goals and high ideals. Many are convinced they are uniquely equipped for their field of service, driven by the notion that if they don't do it, non one will.

This is what I mean by *clergy idealization*.



Yet it doesn't take long to realize that such a high calling comes at a high price. What seemed at the beginning like a fresh breeze, stirring the heart and soul to lofty ambition, can turn into a perilous storm leaving much destruction and damage in its wake

Often it involves disappointments and relational conflicts in the very place of service they've spent so much of their lives: a hostile church member or committee; opposition from the community at large; conflicts and differences within the staff—any of these is sufficient to cause a torrent of trouble for the idealistic minister.

The conflict readily spreads into the minister's home as well. It is no coincidence that research suggests clergy couples have the second highest divorce rate of any profession. And even of those who stay together, their relationships often become disappointing and distressing as the minister sacrifices needed investment in the family for the endless demands of the people.



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A Case Study in Clergy Idealization

When Pastor Jim graduated from Bible college and got his first church he believed he had a special assignment from God to change this church, then the community, and perhaps even the world. He had so many ideas how to do this. He often laid awake nights making plans.

Though only 25 years old, many commented he had “wisdom beyond his years.” He had excelled at everything he set his mind to in his young life. He had graduated at the top of his class and was a popular man on campus. He had married the girl of his dreams and dazzled the pastoral search committee during the interviews prior to the call issued him.

But Pastor Jim had not yet met Barb. Barb was a former union negotiator who attended the church. She was feisty, brash, controlling, and believed the call to Pastor Jim was a mistake. Her career in the union had taught her to mistrust men like him—so confident, so popular, so “good.” She became convinced of her own special assignment from God: to expose Pastor Jim as a fraud and run him out of the ministry.

Over the next two years, the train wreck of Jim’s ministry unfolded—in slow motion. Initially, he was too busy changing things to notice what was happening. The board chairman tried to warn him things were moving too fast, but Pastor Jim just smiled and assured him he knew what he was doing.

But after two years, attendances began to fall, finances got tight and Pastor Jim’s ambitious change agenda became viewed as an ominous threat even to those who generally supported him. Sensing the moment to strike was ripe, Barb wrote a letter to the church board, insisting on a vote of confidence on the future of his ministry. That was the beginning of the end of his first pastorate. He survived the vote. But not without scars. A year of self-doubt and resentment against Barb, and a growing cadre of others, resulted in his decision to leave.

Pastor Jim was particularly vulnerable to the stress and trauma of the ministry because of an idealistic view of himself. This idealization manifested itself in three specific ways. See if you can detect any of these things in yourself.

- Idealized Identity
- Idealized Speech
- Idealized Judgment

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- **Idealized Identity** – *“If I don’t do it, no one will...”*

Most of our problems with idealization originate from idealized views of ourselves--our identity or role as a caregiver. Many professionals, like Pastor Jim, imagine they are the “only ones” who can bring about change in the lives of others. They presume that if they don’t do it, no one will; if they don’t answer that phone call, the person may commit suicide and it will be their fault; if they don’t make the organization grow, it will die. Their role idealization can actually contribute significantly to feelings of defeat and failure when they can’t do what they think they should be able to.

Viewing ourselves as “saviors” and “deliverers” is aggravated by the fact that many who look for care have identity distortions of their own. They often view themselves as “victims” and “helpless.” They erroneously assume that “if the pastor/counselor/doctor doesn’t help me, no one will.” Their idealistic expectations of what ministers can do for them magnify the role distortions caregivers already have. In what ways have you developed an idealized view of your caregiving role in the lives of others?

- **Idealized Speech** – *“I’m the expert...”*

Pastor Jim’s seminary experience had convinced him he was a capable expert, as had accolades he received in his first year of ministry (“wisdom beyond his years...”). When he heard voices of caution and doubt, he told himself, “what do they know? I’m the one who went to school. I’m the expert.” And as he read the latest journals and attended cutting edge conferences, he became more convinced he was right and the nay sayers were wrong. This distorted self-talk made him even more vulnerable to stress and trauma because it not only blurred his thinking about himself and the church, it began to create an unhealthy adversarial relationship between himself and anyone who disagreed with him. How about you? In what ways have idealized speech patterns—the way others talk about you or the ways you talk about yourself —cut you off from seeking help and contributed to your own vulnerability to stress and trauma?

- **Idealized Judgment** – *“I know what is best...”*

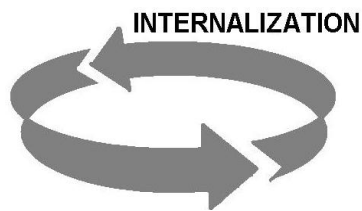
Pastor Jim believed his judgment about the needs of the church was what counted most. Even going into the job, he had become convinced of his special assignment from God to bring about change. This tended to cut him off from voices of moderation or restraint that could have made him approach changes with more caution. Believing his assignment was from God contributed significantly to the idealization. The contrary voices he began to hear just made him more convinced than ever he knew what was best. Thinking about your early experiences as a minister, was your judgment (decision making) distorted by idealization? Can you think of some examples of decisions you made that reflect idealized judgment?

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Storm Front #2: Clergy Internalization

When I use the term “internalization” I’m referring to where we look for the strength and willpower to achieve our goals and fulfill our ambitions. Not surprisingly, clergy who are highly idealistic about their goals are also most likely to rely heavily on their own resources to achieve them.



As caregivers, ministers are often very sensitive, caring people. A life spent helping the helpless and loving the unlovable is certainly a noble thing. But it too has a cost. Where does the strength and energy to help those hurting souls come from? Often, in the reliance upon internal resources, not to mention the stresses and strains of caring for others, ministers learn to compartmentalize and dissociate their personal and professional lives. This can result in a private world or secret self of the mind and emotions very distinct from the professional image they try to maintain.

A Case Study in Clergy Internalization

Dr. Richard Peterson has been in the ministry for 27 years. During that time he’s seen and heard it all. He’s survived it all as well. He has a high level of stability in his denomination and is respected among the other ministers in town. He is well along on his financial masterplan and, if all goes well, should be able to retire comfortably in ten years. In just about every way, Dr. Peterson seems to have it all. And have it altogether.

But one thing Dr. Peterson does *not* have is moral integrity. Since childhood he’s had a problem with pornography and, over the years, it’s taken him places no one who knows him would imagine. He long ago lost interest in the soft porn of his youth. The Internet opened all kinds of possibilities for his primitive curiosities. Of course, these primitive appetites have been fed at great cost.

In order to deal with the guilt and shame, he has created a second self that is totally opposite of his professional image. This self lives only in his mind and on his private laptop computer (which he keeps hidden away).

Whereas his pastoral persona is mild-mannered and compassionate, his secret self is ravenous and bestial. Whereas his wife and children know him as a thoughtful, intelligent, capable man, his online screen name (Dracula) suggests someone very different.

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Every once in a while, Peterson looks in the mirror and wonders about the man staring back at him. And, on the occasional opportunity he is intimate with his wife, he wonders what she would think if she knew about “Dracula.” In those brushes with conscience, he reassures himself that she will never find out. He is convinced he has successfully compartmentalized his secret life so much it would be impossible for his wife or anyone else to trace it. Does he ever fret that his obsession has taken so much control of his life that it rules him? That he is an “addict?” Peterson never allows himself to consider it. “I can take care of myself,” he argues. “I always have. I always will.

A second vulnerability shared by many clergy, resulting in the second storm front of the perfect storm, is the way they learn to process emotion. The frequent demand to display compassion and empathy often becomes just one more technique in their arsenal. Over time, they can, like Dr. Peterson, develop multiple “selves”—the one they want others to see and another (or others) they want no one to see.

- **Internalized Memories**— *“I can’t express what I really feel...”*

Professional caregivers often develop the ability to compartmentalize their “real” feelings and often bury difficult memories from the past in order to maintain a public image. Some of this is necessary in order to survive the rigors of ministry life. But it often becomes an excuse. What happens if your “real feelings” are destructive—either to yourself or others? Do you always know when a feeling is destructive?

Peterson had moments when he realized his pornography addiction was unhealthy. But most of the time he was convinced it was hurting no one. That’s the problem with internalized memories. They are almost impossible to evaluate. A secret life is like a dark closet in the basement. All kinds of nasty things can grow in basement closets! Just pretending it isn’t there does nothing to keep the nasty things from multiplying. Describe your inner-emotional life. If you picture it as a closet in your basement, what is in your closet?

- **Internalized Controls** – *“I can take care of myself...”*

Dr. Peterson did not realize how much trouble he was in. He had no idea that his secret life was a mere step away from public exposure. He assumed his Internet activity was visible to no one but himself. This not only illustrated his naivety about cyberspace (there is no absolute privacy on the Internet), it also betrayed a lie he had been telling himself all his life; “I can take care of myself. I don’t need other people to help me.” This is what is meant by the internalization of controls.



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For Peterson and many ministers, the self-discipline and resilience that got him as far as he had come continued to reinforce his assumption that internalized control would preserve him in the days to come. This internalization of controls makes caregivers even more vulnerable to stress and trauma.

In what ways have you convinced yourself that you don't need the help of others? I repeat: you may not have a destructive habit like Peterson did. But you most certainly have things in your life that need improvement. In what ways have you been trying to convince yourself that you have the inner controls to handle them on your own?

- **Internalized Expectations** – *“It will all work out. It always has in the past...”*

Expectations are the predictions we make about what will happen next. How they develop is complex and related to things from our present well as our childhood. Internalized expectations say, “it will all work out. It always has in the past...” While this may be true, it can also prohibit us from seeking help in the present, even if we know we need it.

In the case of Dr. Peterson, he has had a problem with pornography all his life. He is not proud of it. But he has also been able to keep that part of his personal life separate from his professional life. He hasn't gotten caught in the past. His problems have not hindered him from his professional goals. Why would it become a problem in the future?

What about your expectations? You may not have the same addiction as Dr. Peterson. But statistics suggest that, as a minister you have developed a similar way of balancing your personal and professional life. Are there things in your personal life—thoughts, feelings, behavioral patterns—that you hope no one ever finds out? Like I said, it may not be as socially repugnant as pornography. But what about a secret life of bitterness or anger? What about an all consuming fear of failure or a dangerous obsession with eating? Are there things you know you should change in your life but the risks of change are greater than the risk of exposure? What are they?

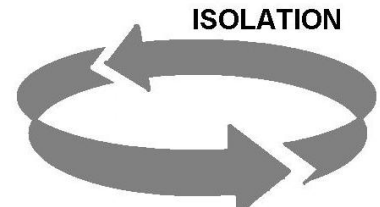


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Storm Front #3: Clergy Isolation

Scientific research confirms that among the various professions, clergy are most likely to feel lonely, disconnected and isolated from others. One study suggested that 70% of ministers admitted they do not have a close friend (**Source: <http://mtmfoundation.org>.) This is ironic, given that, among all professionals, clergy are most likely to spend time interacting with others. Yet the nature of ministry life, the rigors of a minister's schedule (who else is always working on weekends?) and the hazards of a high stress life make clergy vulnerable to the third storm front: clergy isolation.



A Case Study in Isolation

Prior to becoming a missionary, Ann had a career as a registered nurse specializing in cancer patients. In this capacity she knew a lot about stress. She saw it daily in multiple ways, on the faces of her patients as well as their families. She had learned how to cope as best as she could: taking long walks during lunch, reading romance novels, shopping.

But it had gotten too much. So Ann knew it was time to pursue her second passion: missions.

She loved working with children—particularly those from impoverished families. And she gave herself wholeheartedly to the task, not content merely to attend to the medical needs of the children at the orphanage where she served but also getting involved in their personal lives.

All this worked pretty well until she got to know Benjamin. Though she had been taught not to become emotionally attached as a caregiver, there was something about “Little Benny” that broke down her resistance. He was seven. He was bald. His skin transparent like wax paper. He was also in the advanced stages of leukemia. As a cancer patient he was undergoing treatment so couldn’t get out of bed. Worst of all he was abandoned by his family. This is probably what got to her most.

Ann found herself spending a lot of time with Little Benny, checking on him frequently throughout the week, bringing him special treats, lingering a bit longer than she should. Her husband Carl had noted this and commented on it to Ann. “It seems like you are to be spending a lot of time with that boy.” Ann was annoyed. What did he know?

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Meanwhile, things at home left much to be desired. She and Carl were not getting along well at all. He had been having trouble with the field director job for months now. Ann felt he wasn't trying as hard as he could to sort it out. When she brought it up he bristled defensively. She learned to keep her nose out of it, even though she grew increasingly resentful.

They went to church together of course. But the experience was little more than a lifeless routine. She would see other families together and feel even more discouraged. Carl was sitting beside her but he might as well have been on another planet. Sometimes, in those sad lonely moments she would concoct an image of Little Benny and his smile as he looked up at her. That brought a little joy to her otherwise miserable existence.

One of the great ironies of stress and trauma is how it often results in isolation. Even though caregivers are interacting with people on a regular basis, they often feel detached and alone. This was certainly the case for Ann. Notice three features of her behavioral distress.

- **Isolated Alarms** – *"I didn't notice..."*



The more we are preoccupied with our own needs, the less aware we are of potential danger around us. God has made each of us with an internal alarm system that arouses us to action and awareness. Think of it as a smoke detector in your brain, set to go off when circumstances warrant.

A minister's alarm system is absolutely essential in the work of compassion and caring. It is what enables sensitivity and empathy—to "feel" that someone needs help or means something other than what their words declare.

Because ministers are so familiar with this alarm system, and how it works in professional practice, they often abuse it in their personal lives. This was true for Ann. Her alarm system was warning that her marriage needed help. It sounded an alarm that she was spending too much time with Little Benny. And when she was sitting in church it sounded off when she watched others experience peace that she did not have. She knew this wasn't healthy on one level. But on another level she ignored it.

As Ann isolated her routines and distanced herself from significant relationships, she learned how to ignore the warning alarms within. How about you? What warning signs have you ignored in your work as a caregiver? What relationships are in trouble that you have avoided dealing with? What habits have you pursued to take your mind off the problems?

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- **Isolated Relationships** – *“No one cares about/understands me...”*

In the midst of her own family turmoil, it is not coincidental that Ann became attached to Little Benny—violating some of her professional ethics in the process. Feeling detached and isolated from Carl and from other worshippers at church contributed to her somewhat inappropriate relationship with Benjamin. The very relationships that could have been the greatest help to her were the ones she was avoiding. Feeling that they didn’t care about her or understand her was not sufficient reason to avoid them. And trying to satisfy her social needs through a dying child was only setting herself up for more pain when he passed away.

In our need for help as caregivers we often try to avoid or evade the very relationships that we need most, defending and justifying our actions because “they don’t understand.” In what ways have you done this? What are some key relationships in your life right now that you have detached from because “they don’t understand”?

- **Isolated Routines** – *“I don’t want to be with anyone while I do this...”*

It was good for Ann to go for walks to get away from the pressure around her. A brisk walk can restore balance and dispel some of the stress in our body. The problem for Ann was that she always walked alone. There is nothing wrong with going for a walk by yourself. But in Ann’s case, she found it much easier to be by herself than with others—all the while she complained about how lonely she felt.

Consider your habits and routines for a moment. In what ways do they demonstrate detachment from others? Is it possible that perfectly wholesome behaviors have become less so because they represent an escape or evasion?



Chapter 2

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There is another story about a perfect storm. This one is contained in the Bible and has a special significance for pastors, missionaries and church workers. You probably know the familiar story of the storm on Galilee and how Jesus slept in the boat while the disciples feared for their lives. It's recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

^{4:35} *On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side."*
³⁶ *Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him.* ³⁷ *And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.* ³⁸ *But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"* ³⁹ *Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.* ⁴⁰ *But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"* ⁴¹ *And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"* (Mark 4:35-41)

The ancient historian Josephus was so enchanted by the Sea of Galilee he called it the "ambition of nature." Its blue skies, green hills and clear waters were what all of nature aspires to be. In our day, the Sea of Galilee is a favorite holiday spot, with vacation homes and resorts dotting the landscape. In the time when Jesus walked the earth, Galilee was a thriving commercial region, ringed with villages like Bethsaida, Capernaum and Magdala. The Sea of Galilee provided most of the fresh water fish for the Mediterranean world. It was home to many of Jesus' disciples. You may recall that Peter, James and John were commercial fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. They grew up experiencing the many enchantments and moods of what was called in Hebrew, *Yam Kinneret*.

A topographical map of the Sea of Galilee reveals the distinctive features that make the weather systems around Galilee so dangerous. You can see that the entire area is surrounded by mountains. Though they are called the "Galilean Hills" they are much more than *hills*. In the immediate area surrounding Galilee, they reach a half mile high. Going farther to the North (Golan Heights and Mount Hermon), the elevation rises to over 9,000 feet. Obviously, there is a significant difference between the weather patterns at these heights and those on Galilee—which is 700 feet below sea level.



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So, what happens when high pressure winds from the heights whip down into the low areas? Fierce storms. And they can arise quickly, almost without warning. Have you ever wondered why an experienced seaman like Simon Peter was caught off guard by this storm? It's because the perfect storms of Galilee give little advance notice. By the time the disciples were in the middle it was too late to do anything about it.

Predictably, the disciples who were hanging on for dear life imagined the worst. They feared for their lives. After an undisclosed period of frantic attempts at finding safety, someone finally decided it was time to awaken Jesus, who had gone to sleep in the stern of the boat. "Teacher! Don't you care that we are drowning?"

Jesus awakened immediately. We can imagine him lifting his head curiously to look at the pounding storm. But instead of terror in his eyes, there was gentle rebuke and sadness as he looked at the disciples. He stood to his feet, quieted the storm with the simple words, "Peace! Be still," and then faced his disciples:



"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:41)"

Why did Jesus rebuke them for their reaction to this perfect storm? Does it seem a bit unfair to you? After all, they were seasoned fishermen. They knew the power of such storms. Perhaps some of their friends or family had perished in similar storms in the past. Didn't Jesus understand?

On the other hand, why did the disciples falter? Jesus certainly had a point! He had been with them for so long. They had seen so many of his miracles. Just the day before they had witnessed many supernatural events that clearly demonstrated his power. Why is it they had no faith in this dark hour?

Perhaps we should ask ourselves the same question—in the perfect storms of our own lives.
"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

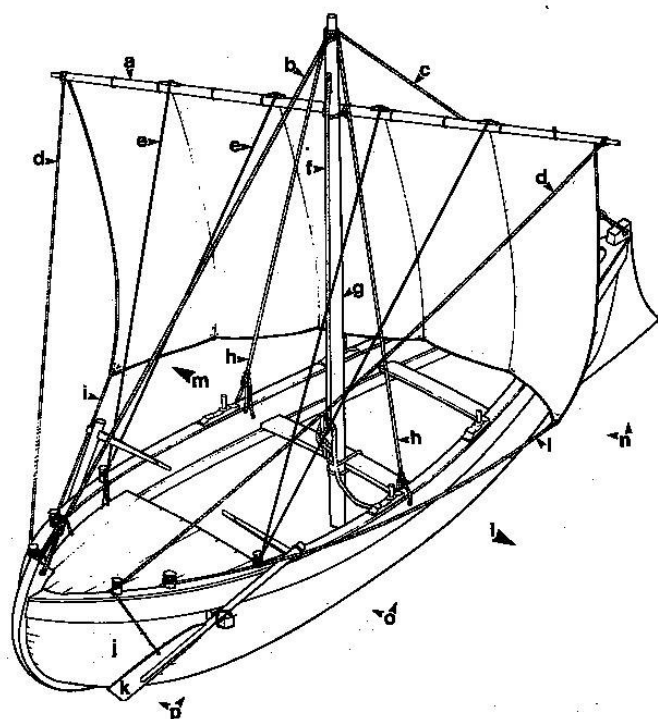
There is a simple answer to Jesus' simple question. **The disciples had more fear of the storm than of the one who made it.** If they would have fully appreciated who it was that rested peacefully in their boat, and trusted rather than doubted him (*"Teacher, don't you care that we are drowning?"*) they too would have had peace in the storm. And the same is true for us.

Chapter 2

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The reason we are so overwhelmed by the storm of idealization, internalization and isolation is that, just like the disciples on Galilee, we are more ready to trust our own skills and resources than the one who made the storm. Before we too quickly judge the failure of the disciples, we had better take a look in the mirror at ourselves.

Many of the disciples grew up around Galilee. Three were professional fishermen. Peter had been sailing since he was a child. He knew ships and the sea like the back of his weathered hand. Several years ago, Hebrew archaeologists uncovered a small fishing vessel in the mud of Galilee. Subsequent testing proved that it was from the time of Jesus and was, most likely, similar to the boat in our story.



Rigging (brailed rig) and general terms pertaining to ships and boats. Key: a—yard; b—backstay; c—forestay; d—braces; e—brails; f—halyard; g—mast; h—shrouds; i—sheets; j—quarter; k—quarter rudder; l—starboard (right); m—port (left); n—bow; o—amidships; p—stern.

Dubbed, the “Jesus Boat” it is 26 feet long and 7 feet wide. It is made of cedar planks and was large enough to carry a crew of a dozen men.

Boats like this were powered by both sails and oars. And instead of a rudder in the stern (like modern boats), it was steered by a special oar attached to the side called a *quarter rudder*. Aft rudders would not be invented for a thousand years. Excavations even revealed a curious detail about our Bible story. The “Jesus Boat” contained a small cuddy cabin in the stern generally used as a storage compartment for fishing nets and sails. It is likely that this is where Jesus had fallen asleep after his busy day of ministry.

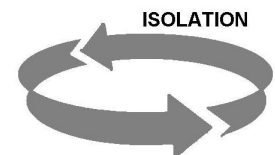
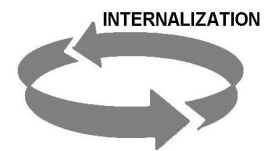
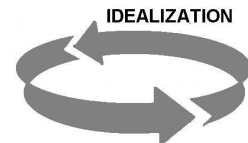
Prior to their experience during this perfect storm on Galilee, I have no doubt that if you would have asked any of them about their skills on the sea they would have replied with extraordinary confidence. They truly believed they could handle anything that came their way. How wrong they were!

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

It's not difficult to see that Peter and the others were facing a far worse storm than the one on Galilee. Jesus called this storm: "little faith." Can you imagine Peter uttering these sentiments in the early stages?

- **Idealized Identity** – *"If I don't do it, no one will..."*
- **Idealized Speech** – *"I'm the expert..."*
- **Idealized Judgment** – *"I know what is best..."*
- **Internalized Memories** – *"I can't express what I really feel..."*
- **Internalized Controls** – *"I can take care of myself..."*
- **Internalized Expectations** – *"It will all work out. It always has in the past..."*
- **Isolated Alarm** – *"I didn't notice ..."*
- **Isolated Relationships** – *"No one cares /understands me..."*
- **Isolated Routines** – *"I don't want to be with anyone ..."*



Chapter 2

Chapter 2

When viewed from this standpoint, it's clear why God' sent this storm their way. The sooner they realized their own limitations, the sooner they would cry out to God for help. In other words, the sooner they admitted their fear of the storm on Galilee, the sooner they would be in the position to fear the God who made the storm. Only then would they experience peace—the peace that Jesus promised them in words like this:

14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27).



And this is true for us as well. There is no doubt that what I've called the perfect storm of clergy stress and trauma is serious business. But the sooner we realize why we're in the storm, recognizing our own limitations and helplessness, the sooner we will be in the position to trust the God who made it in the first place and wants to use the very storm to teach us to rest.

No matter where you are in the storms of life Jesus wants you to have peace. Not the peace that the world promises. But a peace that surpasses human comprehension. So extraordinary is this provision of peace that it enables those who experience it to find rest no matter how dismal the storm. And while most of the time our hope and prayer is that the storms will go away, when we learn to experience God's peace, we will realize that we need never be troubled or afraid. Like Jesus, we will find rest for our souls.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Before we examine specific strategies for finding peace in the perfect storms of life, let's take a closer look at how stress and trouble affects our thinking, feelings and actions. Idealization, internalization and isolation are symptoms of even deeper conflicts.

Inside Peter's Cognitive Idealization

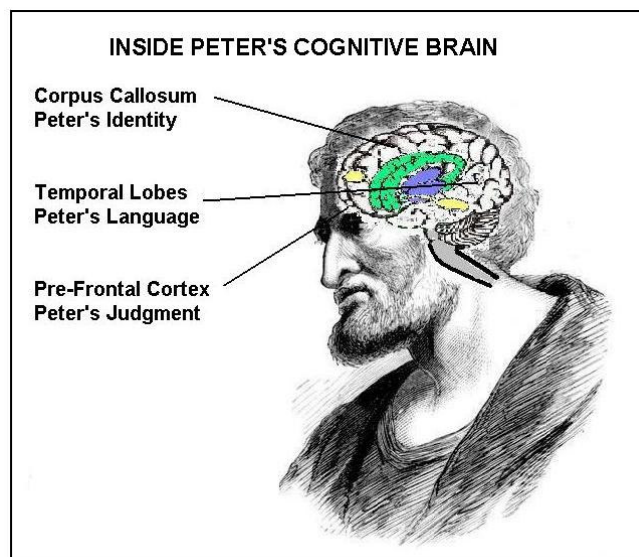
If we could look inside Peter's brain when he was clinging for life on the Sea of Galilee, what would we see? If we had the right monitors and equipment, we could actually find evidence of the cognitive distortion that had developed in his life. For example, between the right and left hemispheres of his brain was a thick bundle of nerve fibers called the *Corpus Callosum*

His left and right hemispheres functioned differently. The left tended to focus on particular aspects of the storm (the wave height, cloud formations, etc.) whereas the right side focused on the entire storm. The left side was more objective and analytical. But the right was impulsive and quick to jump to conclusions. The left was *logical* and the right *relational*.

This back-and-forth of his hemispheric perspectives, combined with the unique mix of his own life experiences, produced a personal identity that lived in the *Corpus Callosum* of Peter's Cognitive Brain. If we had the right monitoring equipment we could see that there were distortions and errors in his thinking; that all the neural connections were not correct.

We could also see that in other parts of his higher brain regions: for example, his *Temporal Lobes*. This is where language and speech patterns were centered. Also, in the very front of his brain, directly behind his forehead, was his *Pre-Frontal Cortex*—the *PFC*. Peter's *PFC* enabled him to make judgments and solve problems. But if we could measure its neural circuits we would find problems there too.

In other words, Peter's idealization was the result of a lifetime of natural processes in his cognitive brain resulting in the frenzied conclusion on Galilee that Jesus wanted them dead. In order for Peter's cognitive processing to come to different conclusions, new neural circuits would have to be established that would "overwrite" the old ones. This is true in our lives as well as we will see shortly.

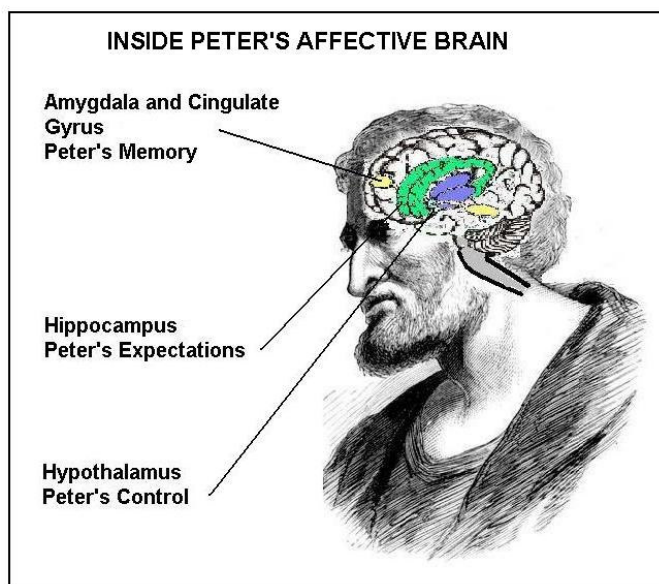


Chapter 3

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Inside Peter's Affective Internalization

If we could look inside other parts of Peter's brain we would see a breakdown in the natural processing of emotion that resulted in the panic and trauma evident in his words. The part of the brain responsible for processing emotions is the Affective Brain. It includes such organs as the *Amygdala* and *Cingulate Gyrus* (responsible for Peter's emotional memories), the *Hypothalamus* (regulating the flow of hormones and neurotransmitters that we call feelings), and the *Hippocampus* (Peter's internal navigation system that allowed him to see how the experience of the moment related to the events around him). If these organs functioned perfectly, Peter would never have debilitating, destructive emotions. But we know from a study of his life that Peter had serious problems in this area of his brain. There was disorder in his Affective Brain developed over years and years of particular patterns of emotional reaction.



For example, we know that the *Amygdala* is like a tiny storage warehouse for emotional memories of frightening experiences. It's not hard to imagine some of the scary memories that had been stored in his *Amygdala* over the years living by the Sea. It's very likely that Peter had heard stories of shipwrecks and deaths—perhaps even members of his own family. When Peter's naming of the storm judged it to be threatening and deadly, these old memories became dominant, triggering electro-chemical activity in his *Hypothalamus*—such as the release of epinephrine (adrenaline) that prepared him for fight or flight.

The internalization evident in Peter's response to storms in his life further disordered his Affective Brain. God's design for humans was that the Cognitive Brain direct and control the Affective; that we *think* first and *feel* later. But over time Internalized Affections, and the dominance of secret memories, makes this order increasingly difficult to maintain. This was the origin of Peter's notorious impulsiveness and explosive temper. In order for Peter to find peace in the storms of his life he would have to learn a new way of processing memories, controlling his emotions and creating expectations about the future.

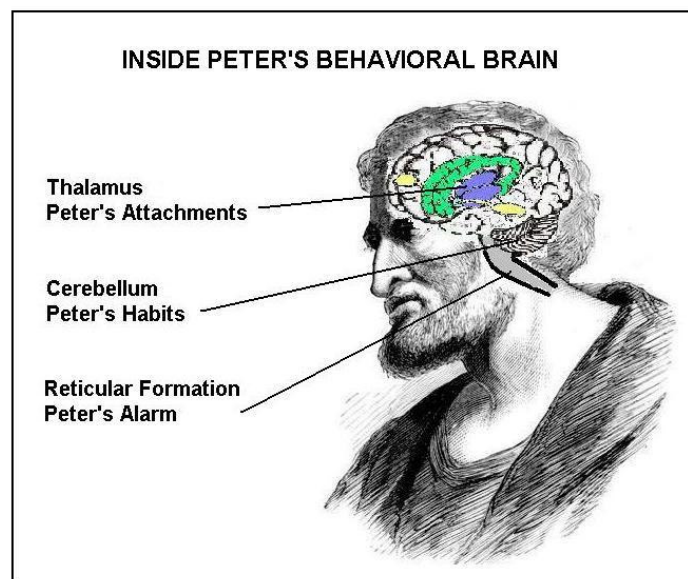
Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Inside Peter's Behavioral Isolation

Over a lifetime of distorted thinking and disordered feelings, Peter had learned that when all other internal resources failed, he could just run away, establishing patterns of behavioral isolation. You may recall the time Peter was in his fishing boat and had caught nothing. Jesus shouted to throw his nets on the other side of the boat. Peter complied. But, to his shock, he pulled in so many fish his boat nearly sank. Upon landing on the shore, Peter was ashamed and his pride wounded. He refused to look Jesus in the eye. He fell on his knees and said, "Get away from me, Master..." (Luke 5:8). Similarly, after Peter's three denials that he knew Jesus, in the events leading up to the crucifixion, Peter ran away, hoping to avoid the pain and trauma he had brought upon himself (Luke 22:62).

Peter had been created with a *Reticular Formation* at the base of his brain that functioned like an alarm system, awakening his brain and forcing him to take action, especially when he was threatened. He also had a *Thalamus*, situated at the top of the brain stem that was responsible for attaching or detaching from people, places or things that seemed either safe or threatening. Data from the *Reticular Formation* and *Thalamus* would be sent to the *Cerebellum*, located at the base of his brain. The *Cerebellum* was responsible to implement routines and motor movements required in response to these messages.



The idealization, internalization and isolation so evident in the perfect storm is deeply-rooted in our lives. No wonder it's so difficult to find peace in the storm. But there is hope. And it is to that hope we can now turn.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

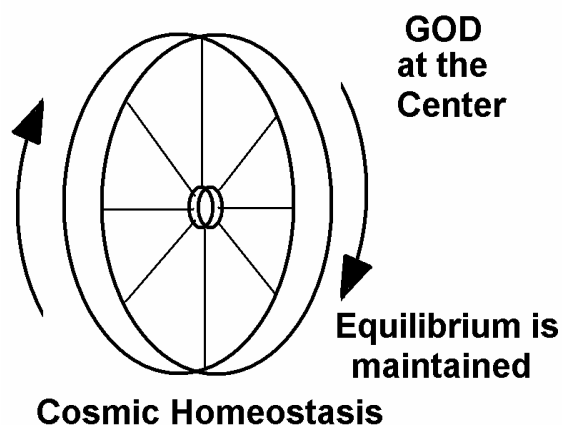
Finding Peace in the Perfect Storm



Throughout Bible history God's people longed for peace. In Old Testament times, the Hebrews longed for "shalom"—a state of affairs both of the individual and the world where all was in perfect harmony and balance. In modern terms we could say the *shalom* or *peace* that God promised was "cosmic homeostasis." "Homeostasis" is like a perfectly aligned wheel that does not wobble. It spins with perfect equilibrium, without friction or resistance around the axel which is God Himself.

Though the ultimate appearance of that kind of cosmic homeostasis will not be ours until God makes all things new at the end of the present age, Jesus' promise to the disciples was an inner peace that the world could not give or take away. It's a peace that enables us to rest, no matter what is going on around us.

The extraordinary thing about this kind of peace is that it thrives not in the absence of storms but in the midst of them. Like Jesus, when we have this kind of peace, we can actually rest in the storm.



A word of warning, however. The offer of this extraordinary peace is only available to followers and disciples of Jesus. I'm not just referring to the twelve apostles who rode with him in that storm on Galilee but to those throughout history who have been called by his name—Christians. Before we go any further, I need to ask you the most important question of your life: Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior and Redeemer? If you're not sure, please take a moment to look at the appendix at the end of this booklet to find out what that really means. For, when you become a genuine follower of Jesus in this way, God promises you not only the gift of eternal life in heaven, but the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit right now. And with that indwelling presence, peace in the storm is truly yours to enjoy.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Peace in the Storm of Clergy Idealization

Try to put yourself in the place of Peter on the Sea of Galilee. When he looked out over the water, what did he see? He saw a storm, of course. But he also saw death. “Teacher, don’t you care that we are going to drown?”

In addition to the distorted thinking about ourselves, clergy idealization also involves distorted, erroneous ideas about the conflicts and troubles we are enduring. This is our first clue about finding peace in this storm. It involves what I call **renaming the storm**.



It may seem too simple to be possible, but the way we repeatedly label and describe situations makes a significant impact on their influence; how we think and feel about them. A label is more than merely a word. It’s also a judgment having to do with its real or perceived significance. Thus, if we would find peace in the storm, the first thing we must do is *rename* it—not based on distorted cognitions or disordered affections but on what is true.

Naming and describing the events in our lives results from complex dynamics in the Cognitive Brain: information ascends from the *Reticular Formation, Thalamus, Cerebellum, Amygdala, Cingulate Gyrus, Hypothalamus, and Hippocampus* and is filtered through our unique personality in the *Corpus Callosum*. After this it is sent to the *Temporal Lobes* where words and descriptors are assigned. Here we have internal conversations with ourselves about what it all means (self-talk and internal reflection). It was in this natural cognitive process that Peter’s perception of the storm was incorrect.

Renaming your storm is more than playing games with words. It’s more than trying to “think the best.” What I’m talking about is seeing the storm from a totally different point of view. Instead of our own, we see it from God’s point of view. This is what Jesus hoped Peter would do. It’s what faith is all about. And the way we learn that new point of view is to have our cognition transformed by God’s Word. For information on how to rename your storm based on God’s Word, see the resource section in the appendix.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Peace in the Storm of Clergy Internalization

Peter's panic in the storm resulted not only from cognitive distortion. It also produced affective disorder. The way he thought about his skills on the sea and his ability to handle storms was distorted because he had wrong views about himself and about the storm. Throughout his life these cognitive distortions resulted in the faulty processing of emotions—the affective internalization evident in his story.

Affective internalization starts as a stress management technique allowing us to bury feelings and memories of past events in a hidden compartment in the mind to which we alone keep the key. But as we saw, the secret self can become a breeding ground for destructive and harmful practices—from pride and bitterness to addiction and abuse. Whereas the solution to cognitive distortion begins with a new point of view about ourselves and our situations (**renaming the storm**), peace in the storm of internalization requires renewed processing of the emotional dimensions of experience. Instead of burying them, we **reveal the secret places** and then take steps to deal with them.

Boats like Peter's were equipped with a small cabin in the stern designed for gear storage. It was large enough to keep fishing nets, anchors, ropes and an extra set of sails. In the story of Galilee, it was also the place where Jesus chose to rest. You can imagine that a hidden compartment like that would be a breeding ground for mold, rot and decay because of the darkness, moisture and dead air—not to mention fish entrails and other disgusting things under the deck.

That cuddy cabin was like the secret places in us; the hidden closets for which we alone have the key. Peter's secret self—the cuddy cabin of his heart—contained the fears, lusts, pride and ambitions he was too ashamed to admit. So do the secret places in us.

What should be done with them? The best thing is to clean them out: and expose them to the light. In practice, this means a new orientation of life, centered not around pleasing ourselves but pleasing the God who made us. This is what the Bible means by a life of worship (Romans 12:1,2). The appendix lists resources to assist you in this process.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Peace in the Storm of Clergy Isolation

There's an ancient motto spoken by sailors around the world: "*One hand for the ship and the other for yourself.*" In other words, a crewman on a ship is expected to do his duty. But, particularly in rough weather, he is permitted to give one hand to this work but use the other to hold on for dear life. No doubt Peter and the others understood well the importance of holding on during the Galilee storm. It is likely that Peter was piloting his boat during the storm, holding on to the quarter rudder attempting to keep the ship heading into the waves (so it would not get broadsided and capsize). But it's also likely that his other hand was firmly holding to the ship so he himself did not get swept overboard.



Even so, in the perfect storms of his life, there were times when Peter did lose his grip—when he let go of the most important connections in his life. This is the problem of isolation. Isolation is often a situational necessity. There may be times when, for geographical or other reasons, a minister is cut off from significant relationships. But this is more an exception than a rule. Through my years of ministry, I believe it is more often an excuse; a way of avoiding people, places or things we don't want to face.

Ministers who are struggling against the storm fronts of idealization and internalization already are not inclined to admit their own helplessness to someone at the risk of criticism or rejection. There are powerful forces at work in the Behavioral Brain—often beneath the level of conscious awareness—that hinder us from what we must do. Alarms in the *Reticular Formation* and *Thalamus*, along with learned routines in the *Cerebellum*, mean that even the most educated and experienced minister will be inclined to relational patterns learned in childhood.

The solution to Clergy Isolation is not an easy one. But it is necessary: **restoring the handholds** means that rather than avoiding or disconnecting from significant others in times of stress, ministers must reach for the right handholds. Even at the risk of embarrassment or criticism, it is impossible to find peace in the perfect storm without a new grip on our "vessel." See the appendix for suggested resources for restoring the handholds in your life.

Afterword

Afterword

When I finally got home after the board meeting, I collapsed in a heap on the couch. I had managed to hold back the tears for several hours—I couldn't cry around those men—those betrayers! The feelings of hatred that welled up in my heart towards them shocked me. They had hurt me more deeply than I had been hurt before. But now that I was home, I fell apart. I sobbed like a baby. I wanted to die.

I was twenty-five years old and in my first pastorate. It had been an exhilarating beginning. I still remember when my wife and I first saw the church building in the small Midwestern town. It was an old, gothic style downtown church with sandy colored brick, a big bell tower and steeple, and a sign in front with movable letters for the pastor's sermon title of the week.

I told Cindy, "This is it!" I hadn't even met any of the people yet, but I was sure this was the place we begin to change the world. Together we prayed in our car as we parked by the curb that God would give us this "mountain" like He did for Caleb in the Old Testament. He did. The vote was unanimous to come.



The first two years had gone well. It was an elderly congregation but with a young pastor and wife, some new young families had started to attend. I was feeling good about the future of the ministry there. One Wednesday afternoon in 1985 I went for a prayer walk around town. I did this frequently, praying with all sincerity that our little church would make a big impact on the community. It was on that walk I began to imagine a new phase of ministry, both for me and for the church.



It would be called "Good Shepherd Farms." Though I knew nothing about farming, I imagined a working farm, staffed and funded by our church. It would be a haven of hope and healing for those in trouble: pregnant teens, drug addicts, runaways—maybe even burned out pastors-- anyone who needed help. They would live on the farm, they would do daily chores in exchange for their keep, and I would work with them in counseling and restoring their wounded lives. I had experienced some measure

of success in my counseling ministry in those early years, so it seemed like a natural next step. After several months of prayer and research I called a special meeting of the key church leadership and with great fanfare laid out the plan.

Afterword

Afterword

It didn't take long for things to turn in a wrong direction. It started with some teasing comments from the chairman of the board—joking about what he called my “fairy tale.” Others began to pick up on the phrase. At first the jibes were good-natured and the teasing laughter spread around the group. But the jabs soon became more hurtful as they made fun of various facets of my plan: “So, Jim, are you going to fix the tractor when it breaks down?” Ha, ha. Everyone knew I wasn't mechanically inclined. Finally, some began to sense that this wasn't a joke. I wasn't laughing. The tension grew and the jokers were silent.



That was the beginning of the end for my first pastorate; the first thread to be unraveled in my understanding of what it means to be a caregiver. I managed to tough it out for another year but things were never the same after that fateful meeting. The fibers of my self-confidence stretched to the breaking point. I began having sleep problems that lasted for the next three months. Like vultures sensing death, others in the congregation decided now was the time to air their grievances. A woman started a campaign to have me removed, citing my inexperience and concocting some bizarre allegations against me. She sent a scathing letter to each board member (but not to me) accusing me of stealing money from the youth group. When I begged the board to confront the accusations and exercise some discipline, they refused, leaving me more uncertain about their loyalties.

In addition to my sleep problems I began experiencing heart palpitations. These too continued for several weeks. When I went to the doctor he observed my traumatized condition and asked (without much sensitivity)—“are you doing some kind of drugs?” (implying illegal drugs). I was not! That hurt even more. I grew increasingly withdrawn and sullen. Unable to pray or read the Bible, I felt alone and forsaken. Twelve months later, I couldn't take it anymore. I turned in my letter of resignation to the board. Welcome to the world of stress and trauma.

Though the disappointment and despair that followed was painful, I did not realize that wounds like that leave lasting scars. Nor did I understand the dynamics that got me there to begin with. Even so, over the next several years, God began to show me things about myself and my circumstances that brought healing to my wounded heart. Not only my own, but after many years, God graciously allowed me to begin to realize the dream I had back in 1985. In fact, exactly 20 years later, I became the director of a clergy care ministry, giving me opportunity to use my own experiences in the service of others. The resource you hold in your hands is some of the fruit of that experience.

Afterword

Afterword

If there's anything I've learned over the years since these formative events it's that ministry is never an easy thing. Even so, there's a difference between "easy" and "simple." And, even though finding peace in the perfect storm of clergy stress and trauma is not easy, it is relatively simple and straightforward. It involves the understanding and implementation of the three storm management strategies I've described:

Peace in the Storm of Clergy Idealization: Renaming the Storms of Your Life

Peace in the Storm of Clergy Internalization: Revealing the Secret Places of Your Life

Peace in the Storm of Clergy Isolation: Restoring the Handholds of Your Life

At the *Fortress Institute for Stress and Anxiety* we are committed to helping those in the midst of various storms of life understand and implement these strategies. Our approach to stress and anxiety management is practical, scientifically valid and theoretically grounded in the truth of God's Word.



As a licensed counselor, ordained minister and member of the American Association of Christian Counselors, I am uniquely qualified to work with pastors, missionaries and other professionals beset by various storms in their personal lives, families and ministries. If after reading this booklet you are convinced that you or someone you know may benefit from our approach, we have developed three program options:

- *Peace in the Perfect Storm Self-Study Track*

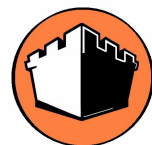
We have designed a practical, step-by-step seven week study including written and audio materials specifically for ministers in the midst of their own perfect storm. You can read and listen to the study modules and do the practical exercises at your own pace. Cost is \$100.

- *Peace in the Perfect Storm Guided Study Track*

The second option is a guided study, using the resources above. If you select this approach you will not only do the step-by-step study and listen to the audio materials at your own pace but you will have a one hour, completely confidential weekly telephone, internet or face-to-face consultation with a licensed, trained clergy counselor. Cost is \$350.00

- *Peace in the Perfect Storm Retreat*

Some ministers are in such a difficult storm they need an intensive level of intervention. We have designed the Peace in the Perfect Storm Retreat for them. These are scheduled at various times throughout the year, sometimes include other ministers, and are conducted at our retreat center in Mid-Michigan. Contact us for pricing.



FORTRESS INSTITUTE

Afterword Afterword

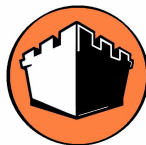
The next step is up to you. If you would like more information about our resources or services, please contact me:

Telephone: 989.721.0104

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Appendix 1

Appendix 1

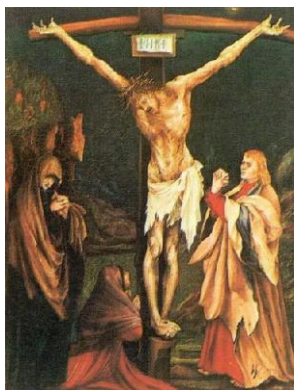
Two Kinds of Peace

The Bible describes two kinds of peace. In Paul's letter to the Philippians he talks about a "peace that passes understanding" (Philippians 4:4-6): the peace **of** God. This is the kind of peace we have been describing. It is not an *external* rest that comes in the absence of storms, rather an *internal* quiet and rest that comes in the midst of them. As we've seen, it requires that we rename the storm, reveal the secret places in our lives and restore the handholds in our significant relationships.

However, there is a second way that word peace is used. In Paul's letter to the Romans he says we need this kind of peace before we can have the peace **of** God. This is peace **with** God (Romans 5:1) Peace **with** God is ours only after we become followers or disciples of Jesus Christ. You cannot hope to experience the peace **of** God until you have experienced peace **with** Him. So, how can you be sure you have peace **with** God? What does it mean to be follower or disciple of Jesus? It isn't easy to become a Christian, but it is simple: as simple as "A.B.C." It's so simple a child can understand:

A – Admit we are Sinners - Our greatest problem in life is not the storm of trouble around us or the storm of stress and trauma within. It may feel like that, but our greatest problem in life is actually the sin that separates us from our Creator. The Bible says that every child of Adam is born in sin (Romans 5:12) and that those who admit this fact, and their own sinful condition are the ones who can be saved.

B – Believe Jesus is our Only Savior - Even as our greatest problem in life is the sin that separates us in our natural condition from God, so the only solution is to trust in Jesus Christ as our only savior from that condition (Romans 5:8). Belief is a cognitive assent to objective statements found in God's Word.



C – Call on Jesus' Name - Belief or cognitive assent to God's promises becomes saving faith when we obey what the Bible says and "call" on Jesus to rescue us from our doomed condition (Romans 10:13). When we do, God cancels the penalty of sin against us (Romans 6:23), plants His own Spirit in us as a guarantee of his promises (Ephesians 1:13,14), and welcomes us into the family of God.

Have you taken these steps to find peace with God?

Appendix 2

Appendix 2

Resources for Finding Peace in the Perfect Storm

In our mission to bring hope and healing to hurting ministers, the *Fortress Institute for Stress and Anxiety* has developed biblically grounded, scientifically validated, practically useful resources for finding peace. The *Peace in the Perfect Storm* study guide can be used in a variety of ways: as an individual, self-guided study; as the basis of a guided study by one of our trained clergy care counselors, or in a group setting such as a *Peace in the Perfect Storm Retreat*. The seven module study, including hands on assignments and practical learning activities, covers the following topics in depth:



Module 1 – *The Storms of Life*

Module 2 – *Behavioral Distress in the Storm*

Module 3 – *Affective Disorders in the Storm*

Module 4 – *Cognitive Distortion in the Storm*

Module 5 – *Peace of Mind in the Perfect Storm*

Module 6 – *A Peaceful Heart in the Perfect Storm*

Module 7 – *Peaceful Actions in the Perfect Storm*

To find out more about these and other resources and services, please contact us:

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