



WIRED FOR CONNECTION

ONMB Pastors and Leaders Day
Addressing Pastoral Vulnerability and Power Dynamics

February 2024
Carolyn Klassen
Wired for Connection

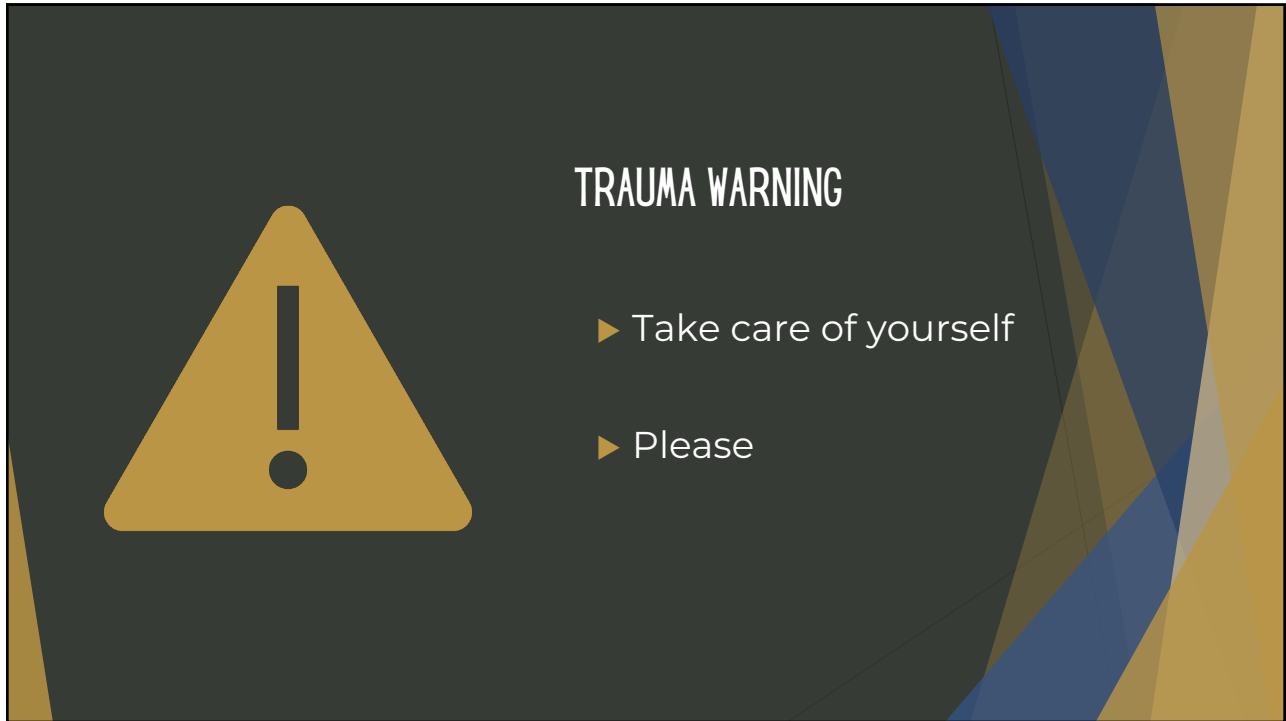


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GOOD INTENTIONS
ARE NOT ENOUGH:
FRANK TALK ABOUT
PASTORAL
VULNERABILITY AND
ABUSES OF POWER

2



TRAUMA WARNING

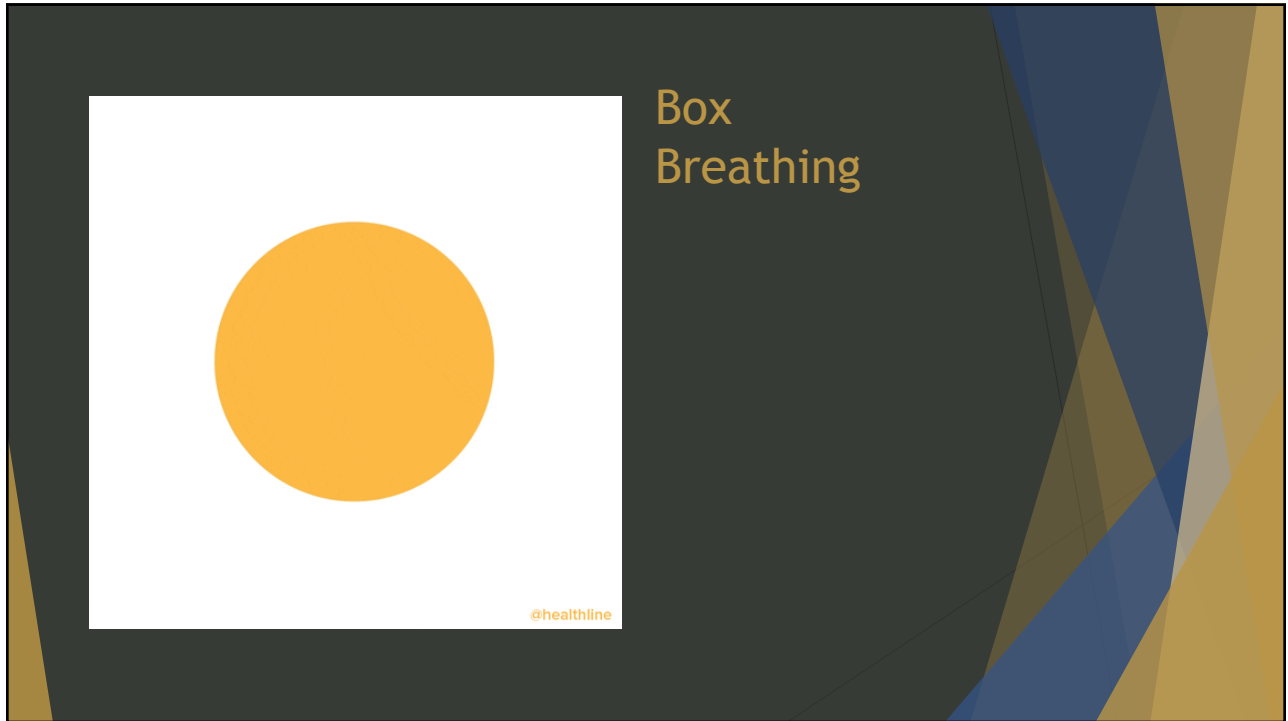
- ▶ Take care of yourself
- ▶ Please

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FRUSTRATION WARNING
Tips and Tricks are secondary
Hold space for paying attention to the discomfort

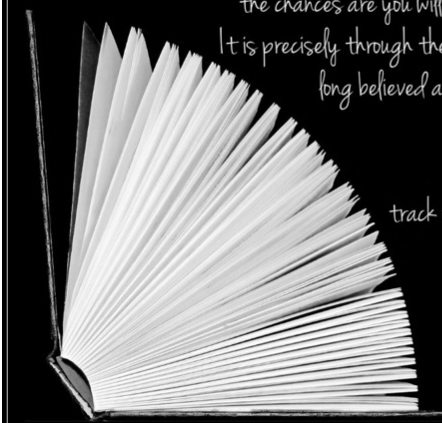
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My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it any thing like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours. It is precisely through these stories in all their particularity, as I have long believed and often said, that God makes himself known to each of us more powerfully and personally. If this is true, it means that to lose track of our stories is to be profoundly impoverished not only humanly but also spiritually."

Frederick Buechner

CONFIDENTIALITY

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CAVEATS

- ▶ For me, this is personal, deeply personal and professional
- ▶ This is human
- ▶ This is pre-emptive
- ▶ This is about *this*, not about *that*
- ▶ *And this day is a dream come true for me*

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YOU ALREADY KNOW...

- ▶ Pastoral sexual abuse is wrong
- ▶ Abuse of power is wrong
- ▶ Pastors have power
- ▶ Pastors have power and to abuse it is wrong
- ▶ Abuse of power is real and evil
- ▶ Policies to prevent abuse in the church are mandatory and needed
- ▶ Policies alone are not enough to prevent harm
- ▶ We cannot policy our way into certain safety—and trying too hard creates other issues



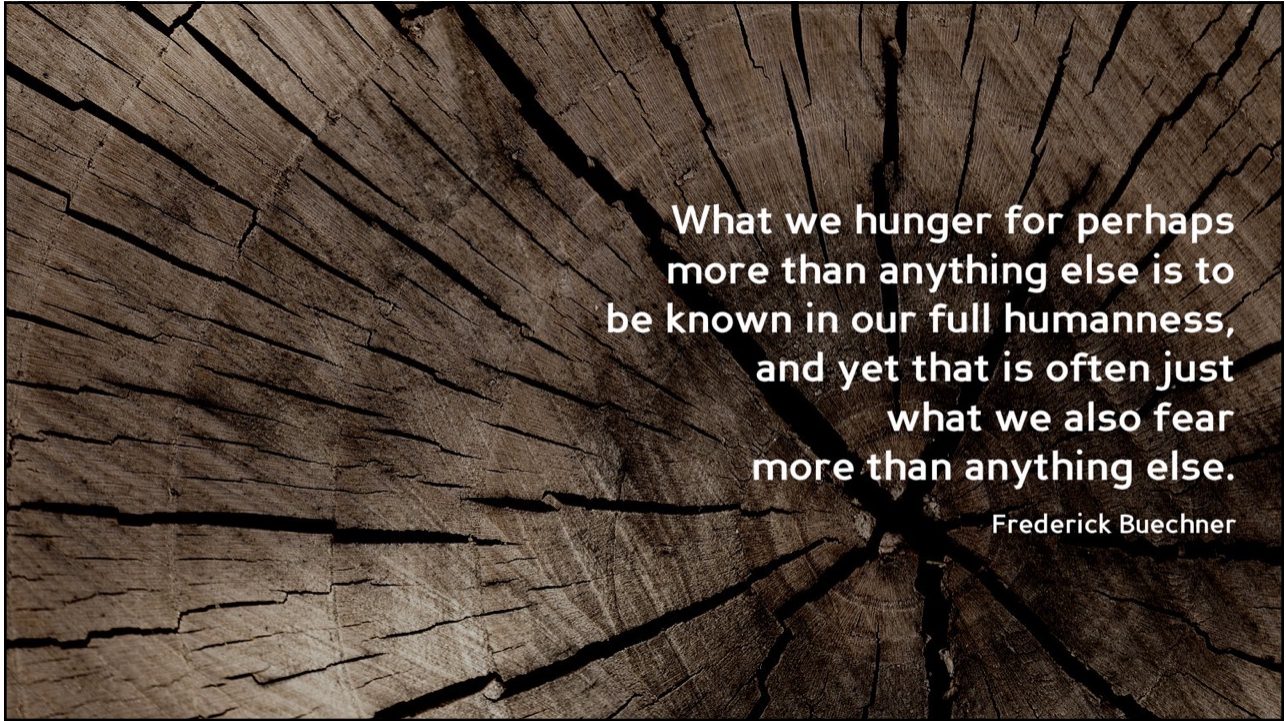
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WHAT I KNOW: HURT PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE

- ▶ Clients who see me after they have been the “powerful” in an “abuse of power” relationship:
 - ▶ Would never describe it as abuse of power
 - ▶ Acknowledge the woundedness that it rose out of
 - ▶ Have insight “after” they completely lacked before



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What we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else.

Frederick Buechner

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TODAY: ABOUT
HONOURING YOU IN
YOUR HUMANITY

In candid, real, messy,
vulnerable ways

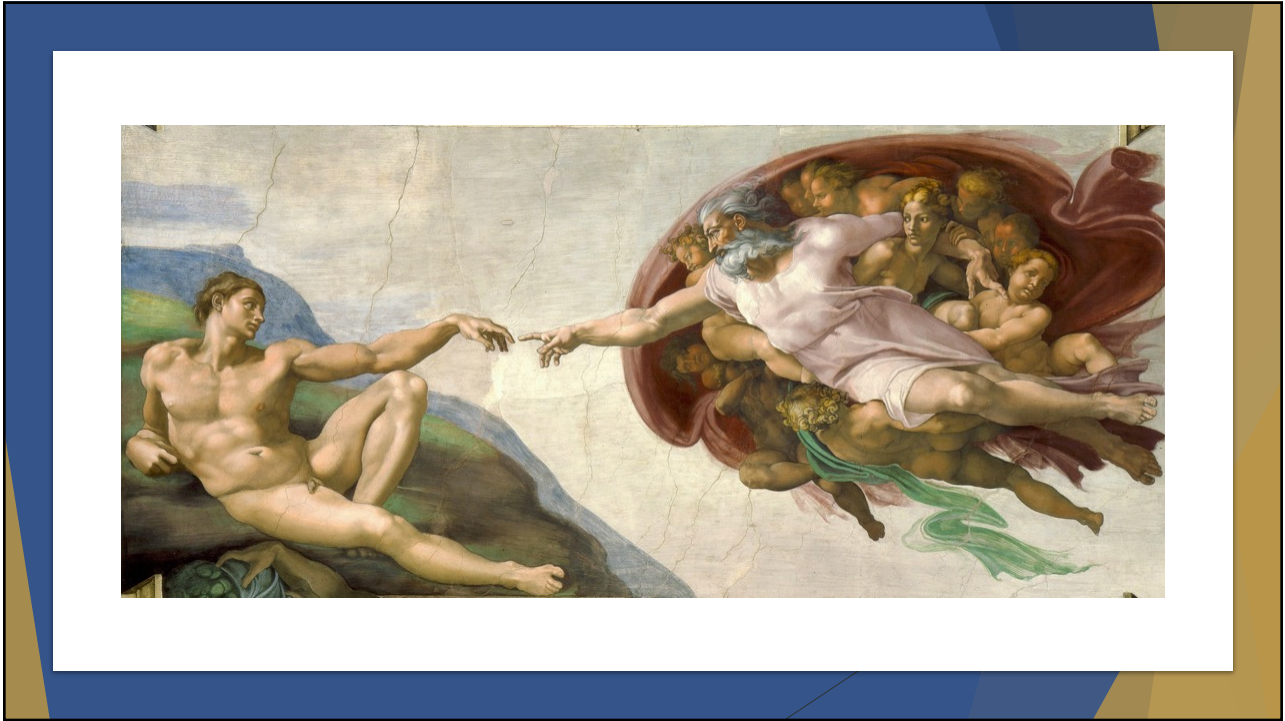
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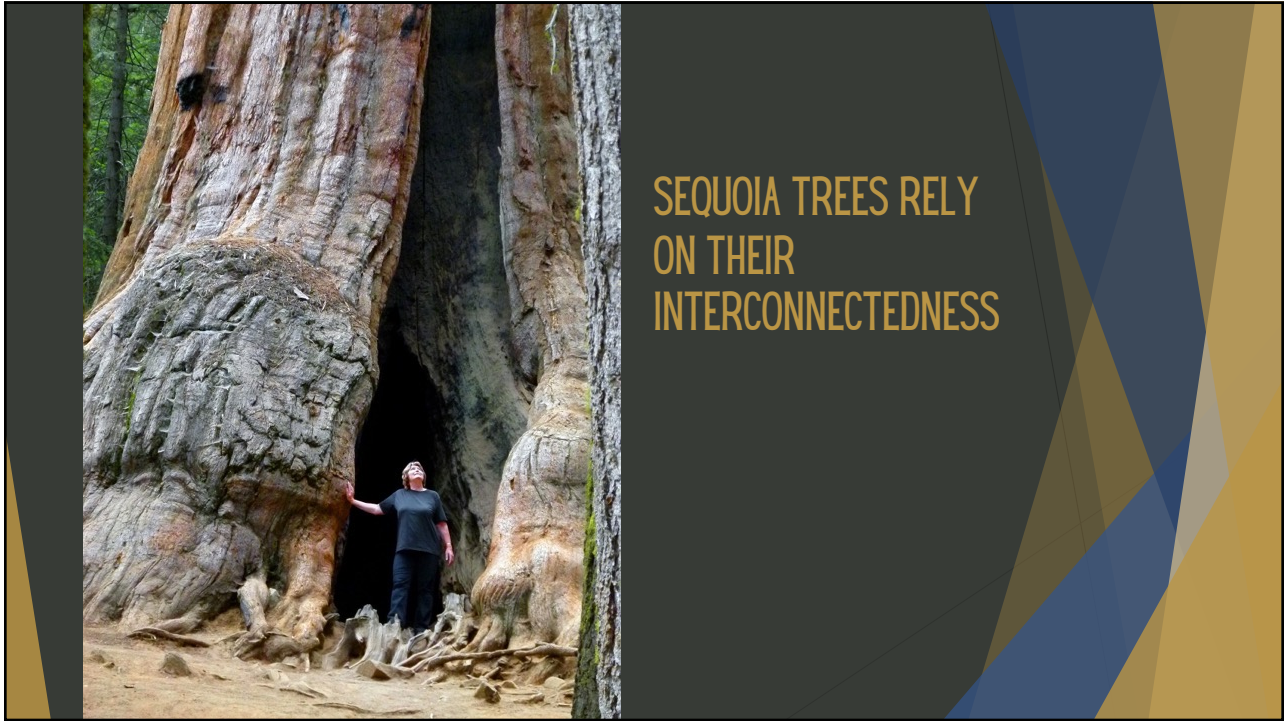
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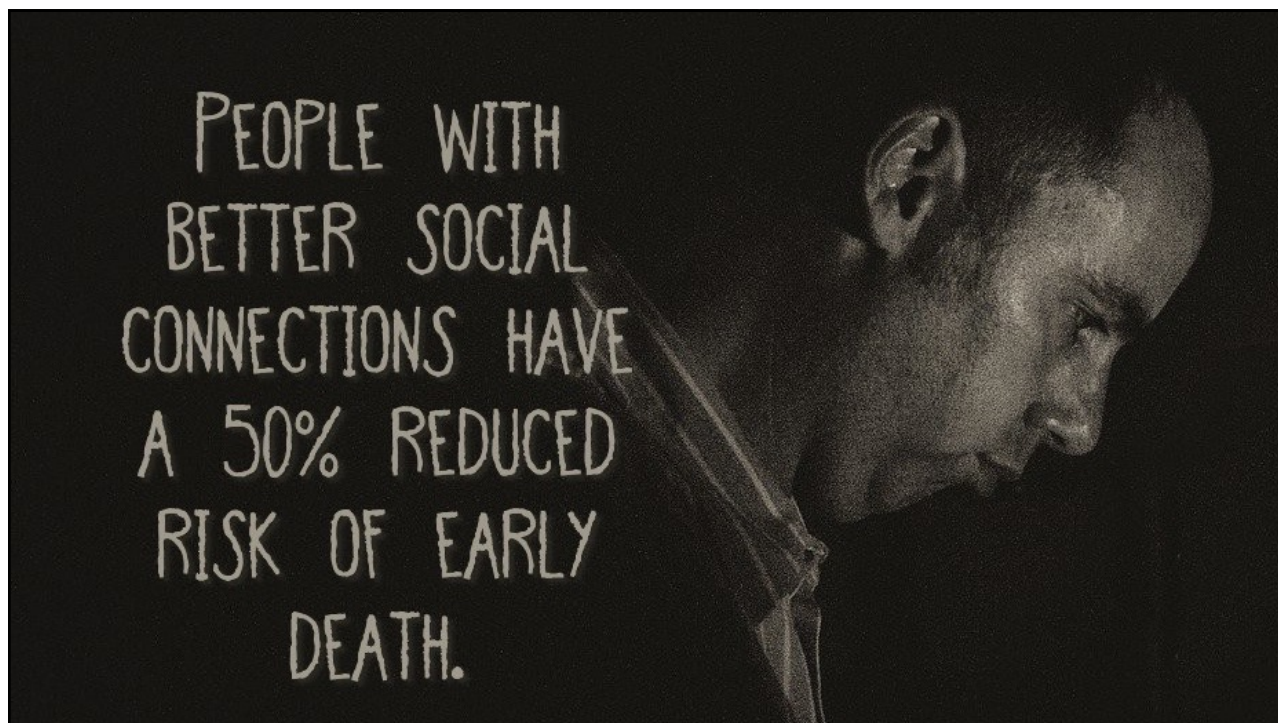
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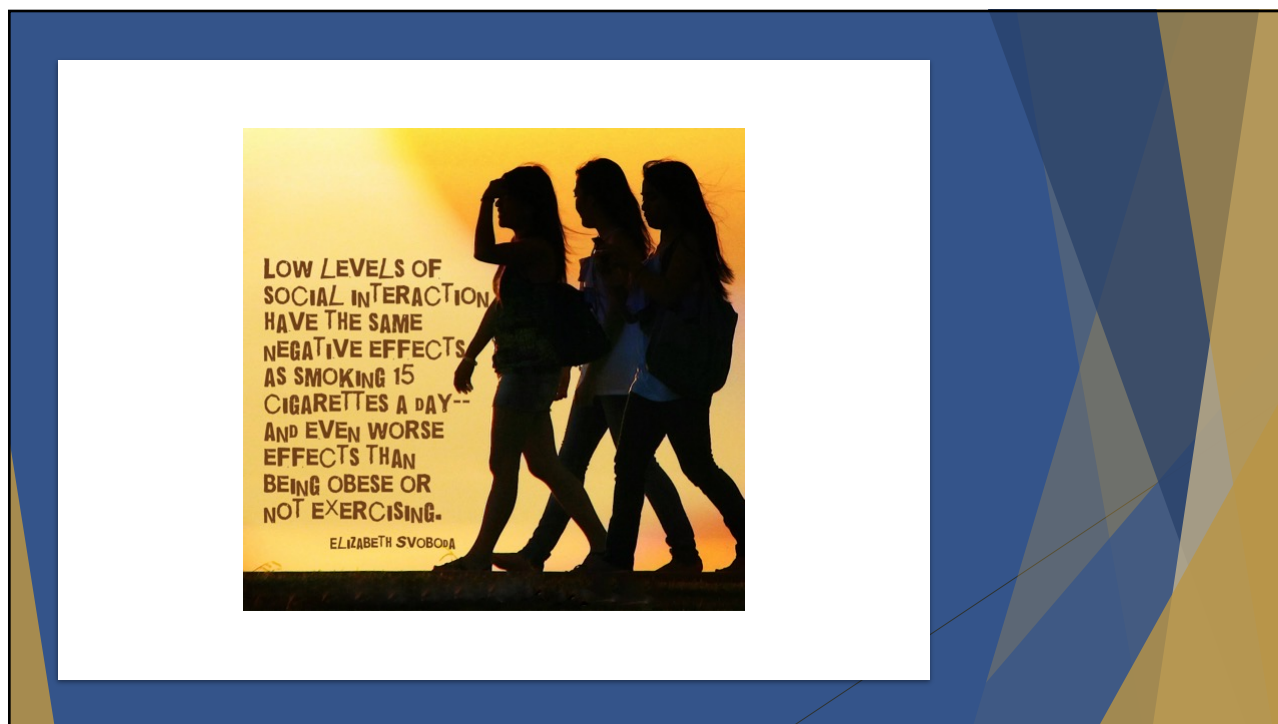
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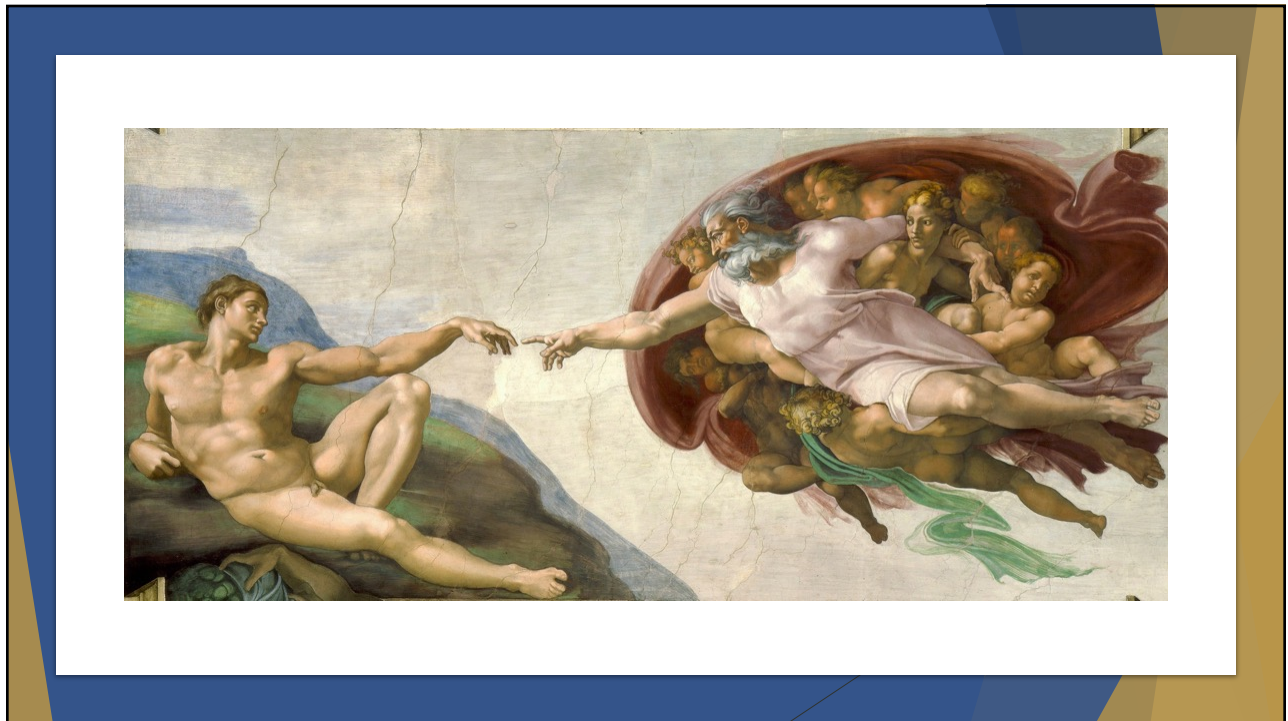
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E.T.

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We are wired for connection

It has **always** been hard. Even before the pandemic.

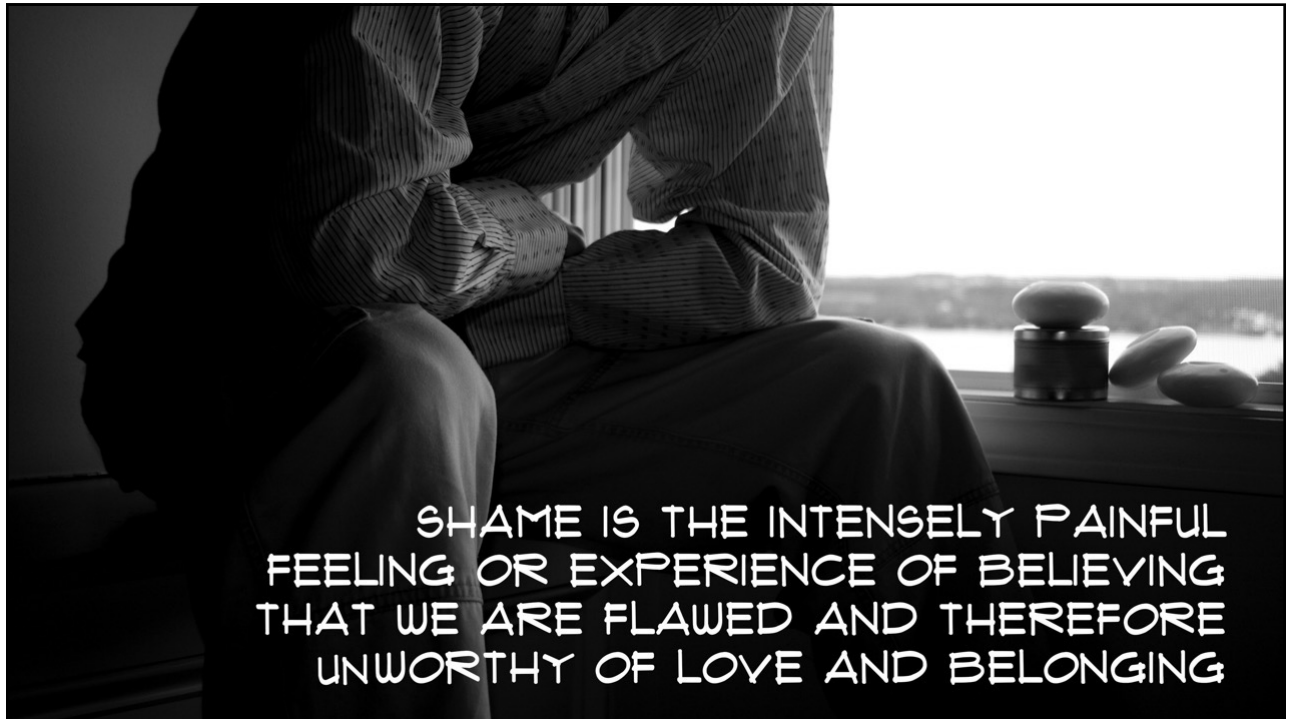
PHOTO BY IAN MCCLAUSLAND

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SHAME IS THE FEAR OF DISCONNECTION

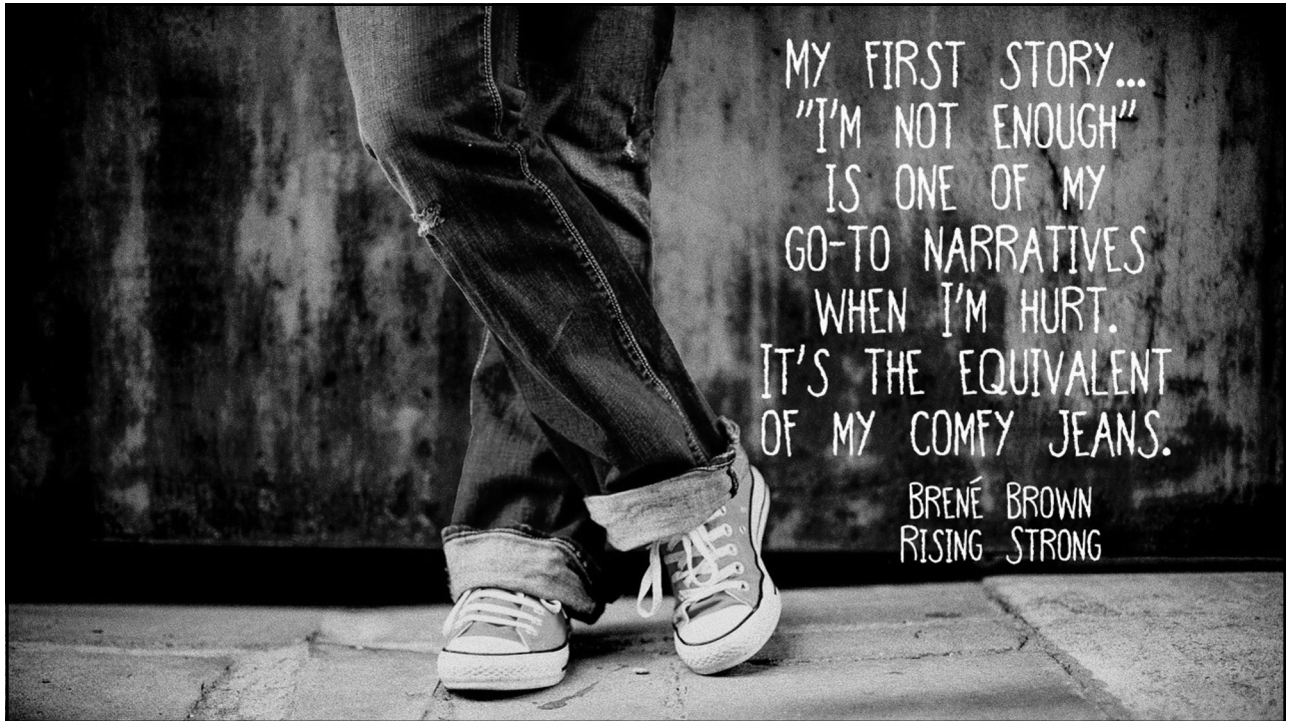
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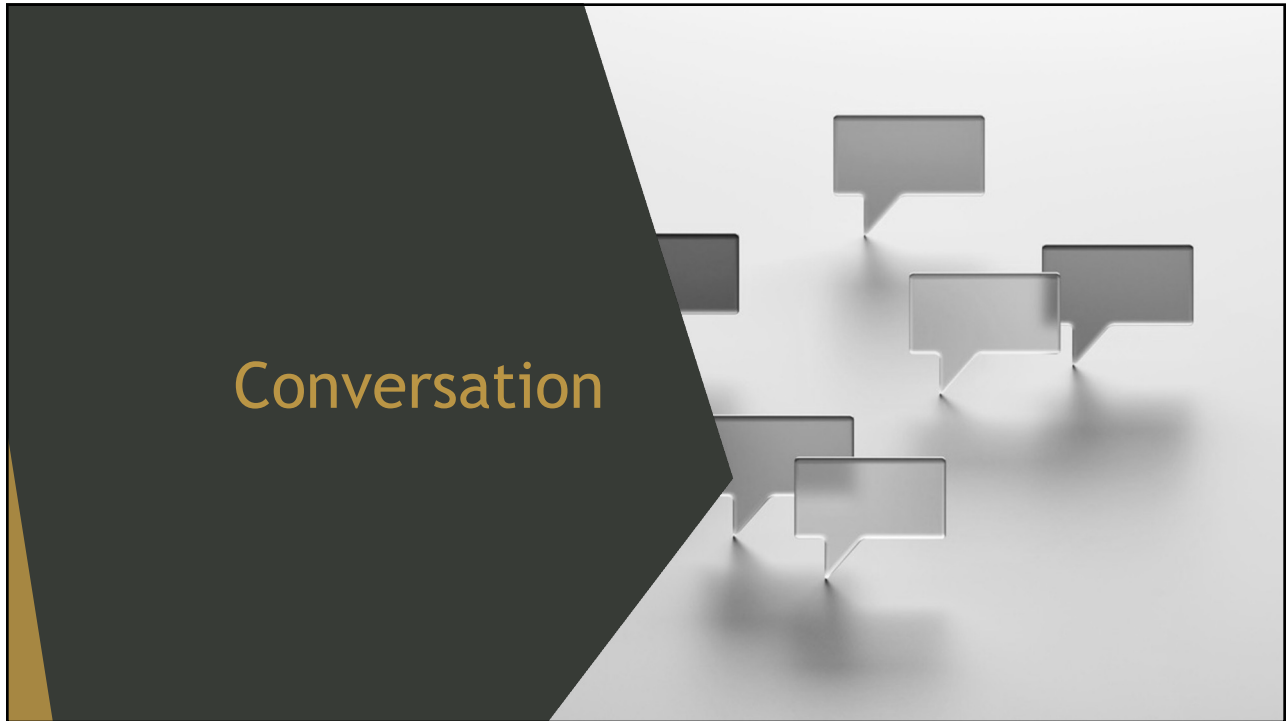
LET'S SHARE TOGETHER

1. What is an isolating factor for a pastor that non-pastors don't know or don't "get"?
2. What is one way you notice the pain of pastoral loneliness showing up in your life?
3. The most vulnerable part of being a pastor/leader in my church is: _____
4. As I anticipate a difficult/challenging situation with a parishioner and I notice myself pulling back, the feelings/thoughts that fight me on showing up are: _____
5. When I grew up, letting people in on thoughts of my own struggle or real temptations was seen as: _____
6. A struggle in me about the work of church leadership that is real but might be judged if I talked about it is...

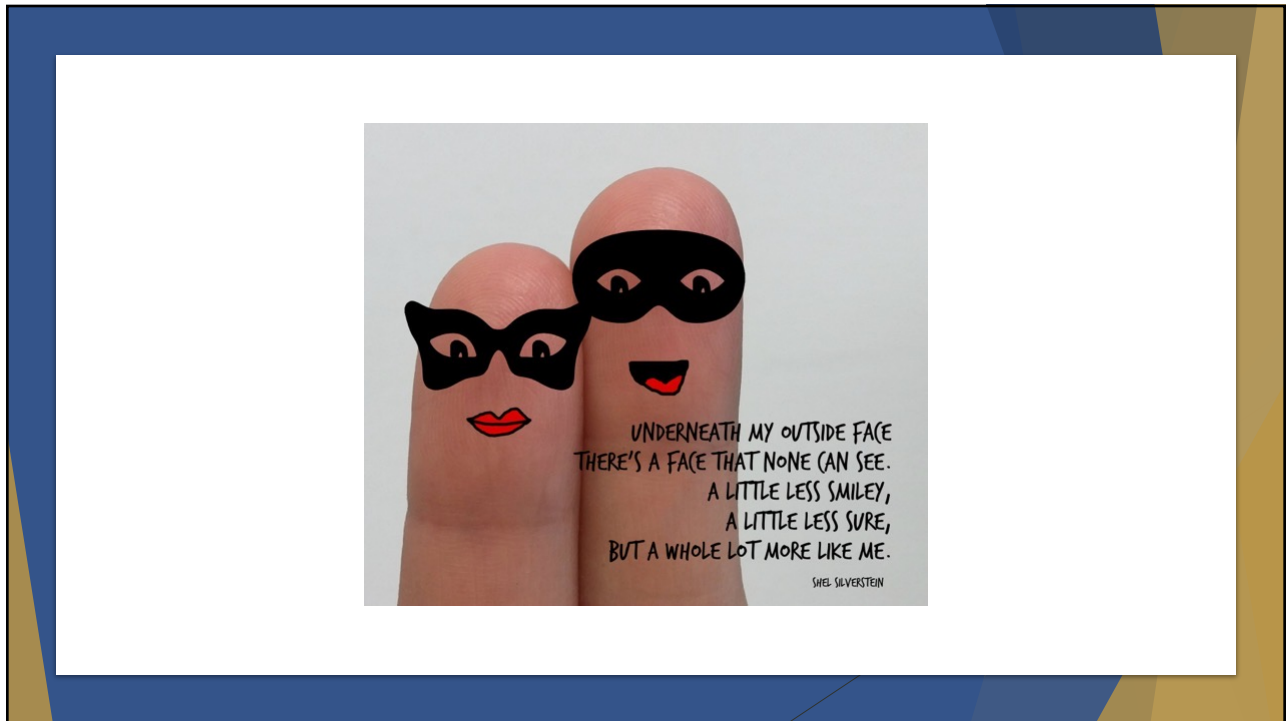
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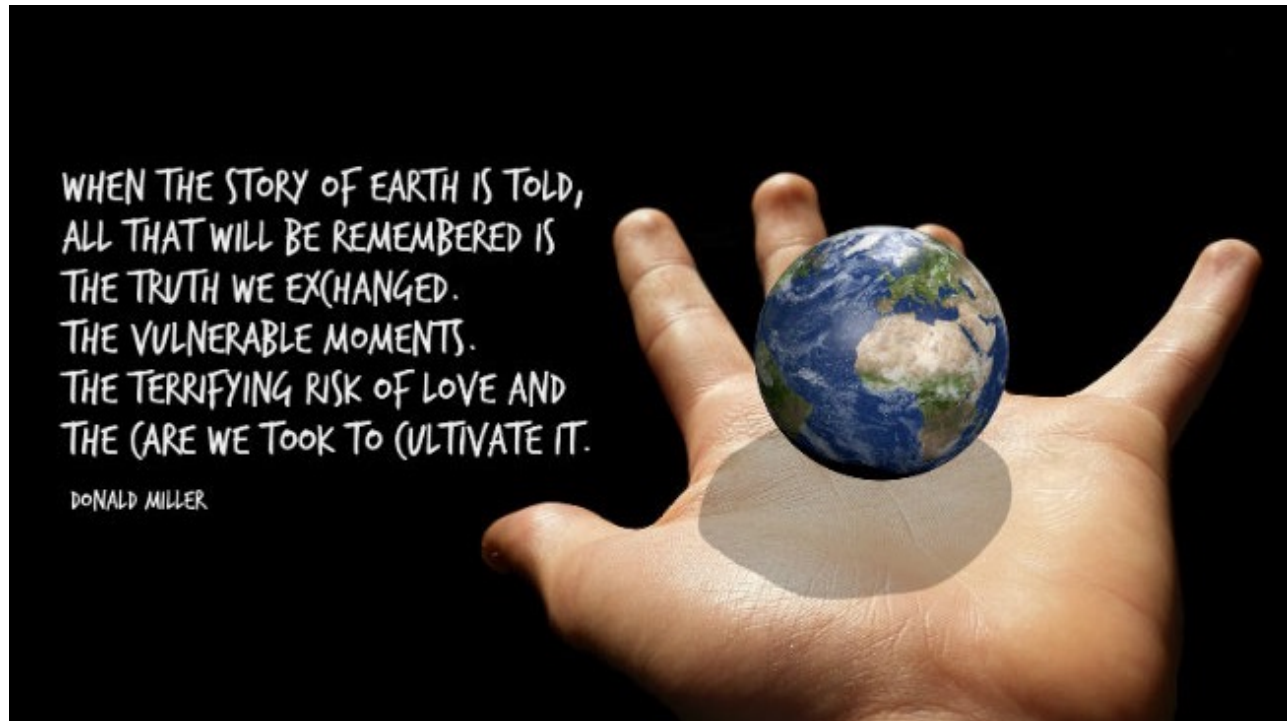
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YOUR HAND IS ON THE DOOR OF THE ARENA YOU ARE ABOUT TO ENTER. WHAT IS KEEP YOU FROM GOING IN? WHAT FEELINGS OR THOUGHTS ARE YOU EXPERIENCING?

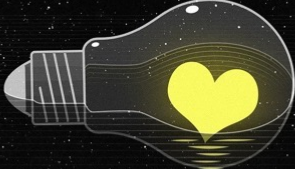
- ▶ I'm not competent enough
- ▶ Feels useless to bother
- ▶ Not being accepted
- ▶ Being left
- ▶ Fear (multiple times)
- ▶ I need to impress people
- ▶ Risk of betrayal
- ▶ Fear of unknown
- ▶ Exhaustion
- ▶ Complacency
- ▶ I'm not good enough
- ▶ The uncertainty of change
- ▶ Fear of rejection and failure

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WHAT MESSAGES CROP UP AS YOU TRY TO ENTER THE ARENA?

- ▶ You are not enough
- ▶ People don't understand and will judge. Don't trust
- ▶ You're a phony
- ▶ Things will get worse
- ▶ You don't know what you are doing
- ▶ You are on your own
- ▶ You might not be able to do it
- ▶ You don't belong here
- ▶ You're only going to screw up
- ▶ Others are more qualified
- ▶ You won't be heard
- ▶ This won't go well

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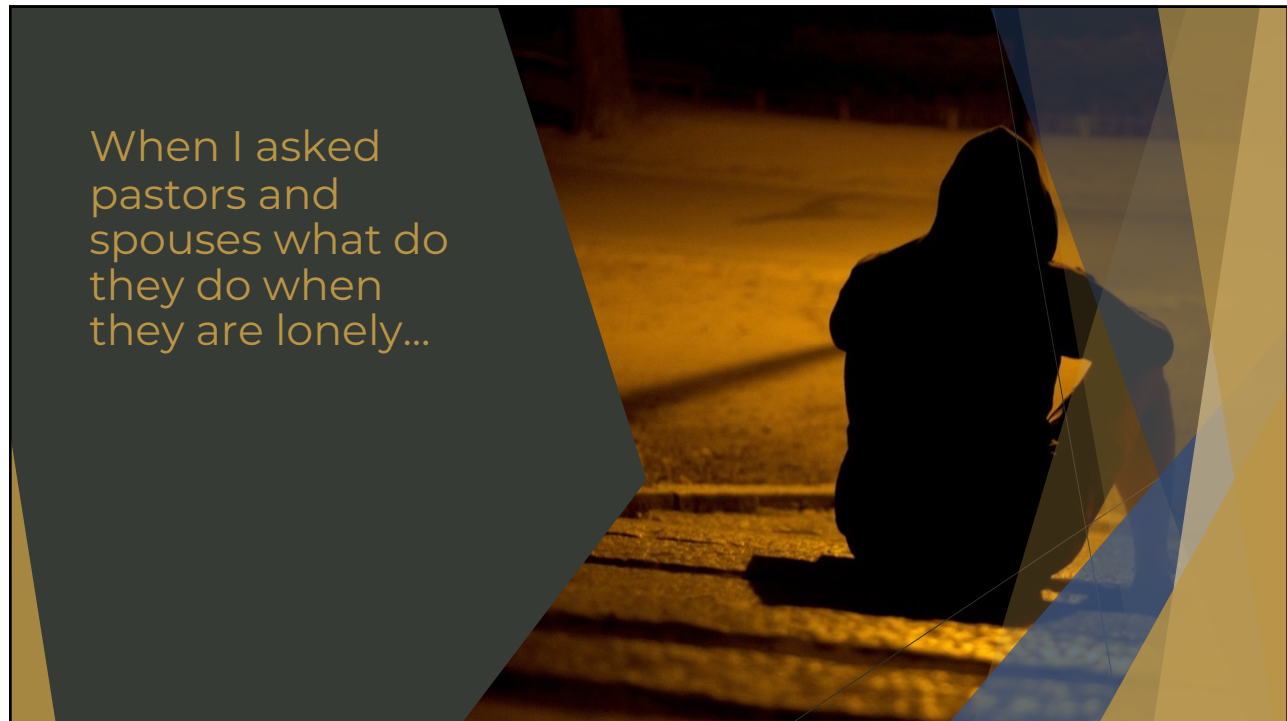


A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.

Brene Brown

We abuse power.

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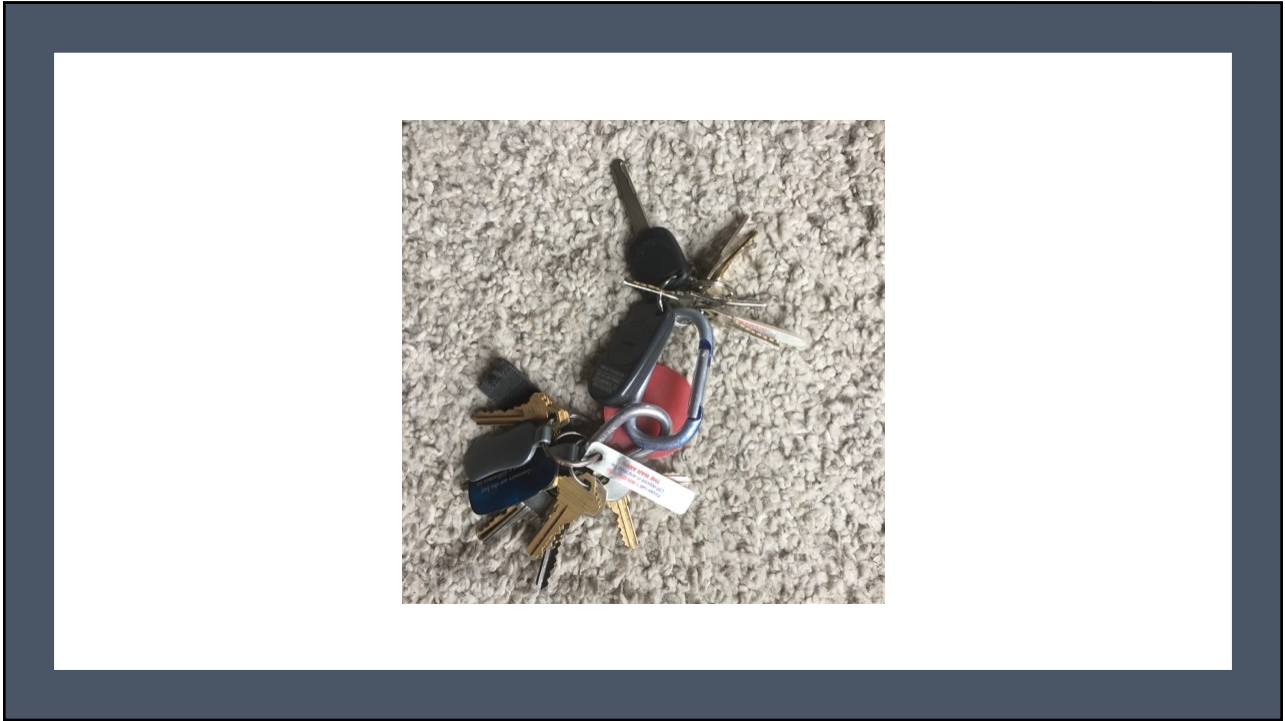
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WHEN YOU ARE LONELY, WHAT IS YOUR "GO TO" ACTION? WHAT DO YOU DO NOTICE YOURSELF DOING WHEN YOU ARE LONELY?

- ▶ Social media
- ▶ Eat
- ▶ Sleep
- ▶ Video games
- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ [Pornography]

▶ ...a *single* response was about calling a person

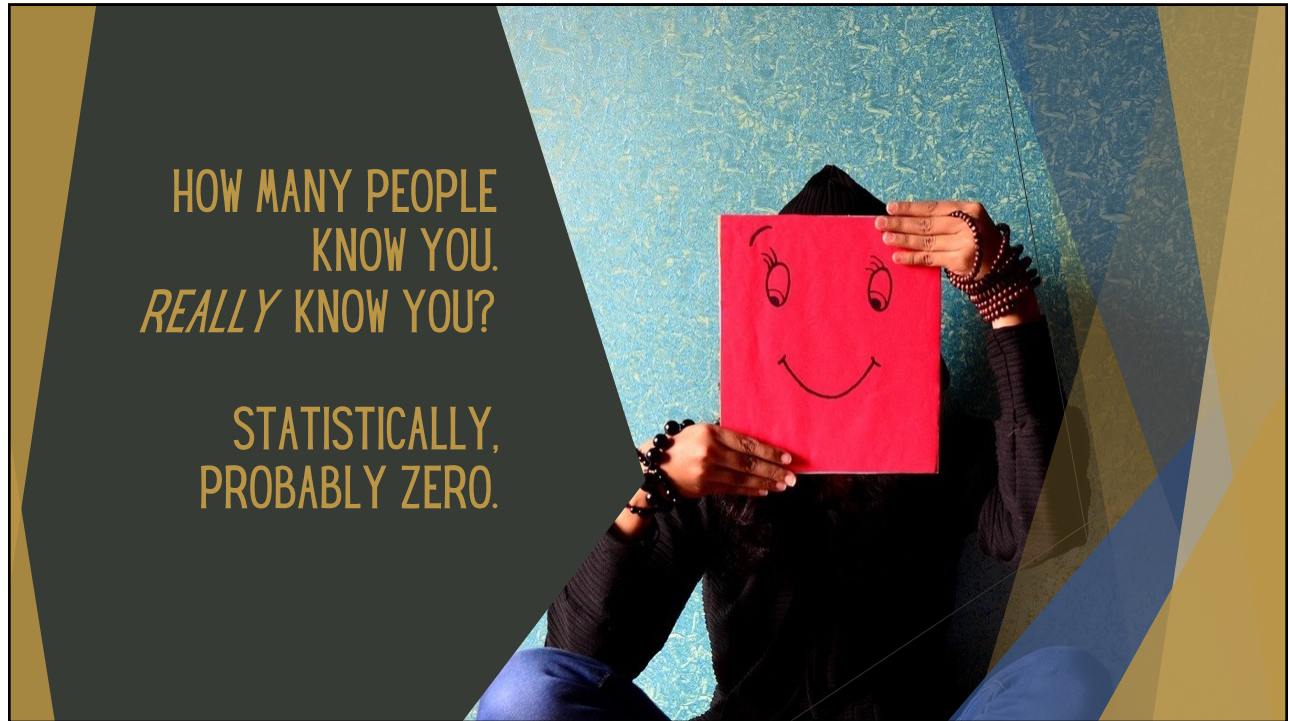
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HOW MANY PEOPLE
KNOW YOU.
REALLY KNOW YOU?

STATISTICALLY,
PROBABLY ZERO.

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HOW MANY PEOPLE
KNOW YOU.
REALLY KNOW YOU?

STATISTICALLY,
PROBABLY ZERO.
OR 1— YOUR PARTNER

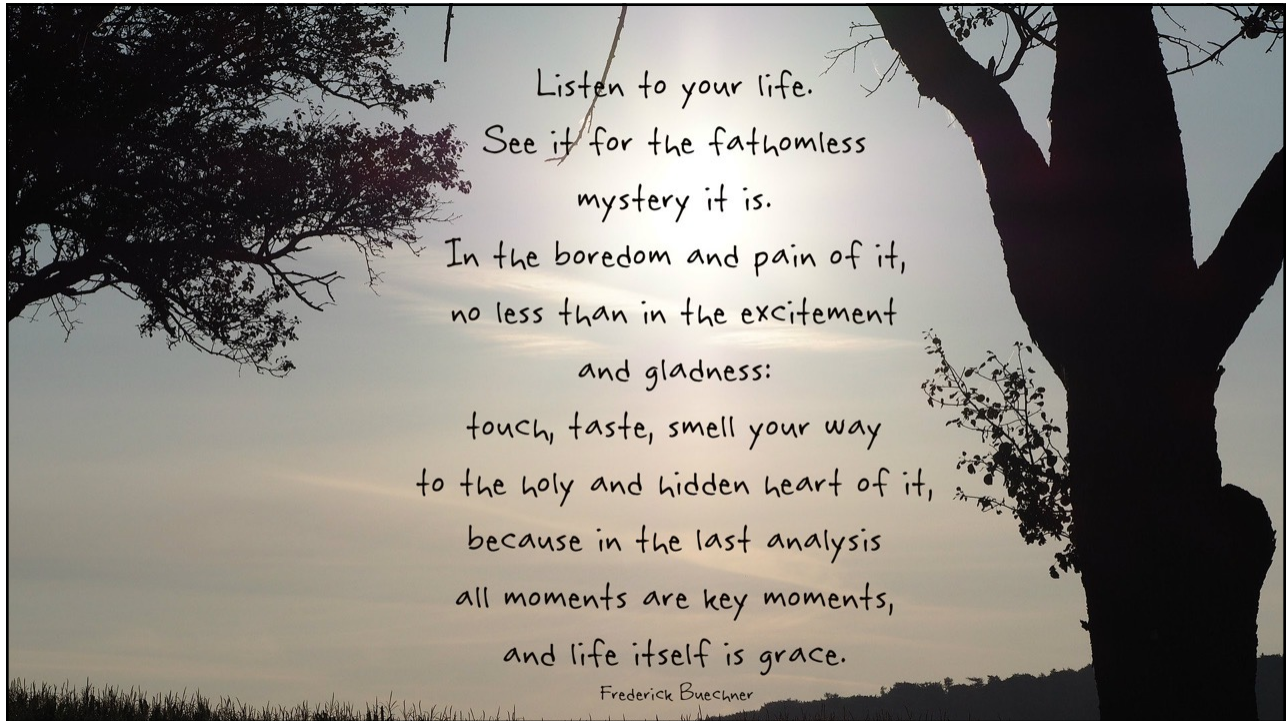
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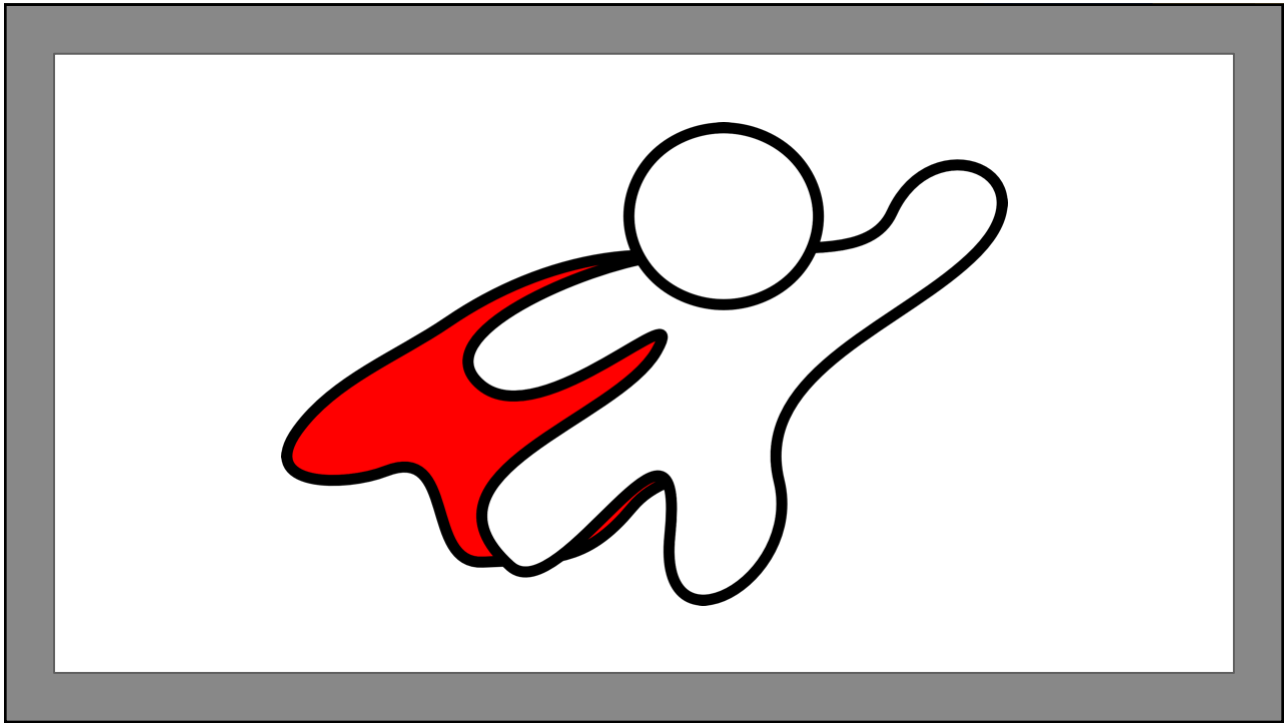
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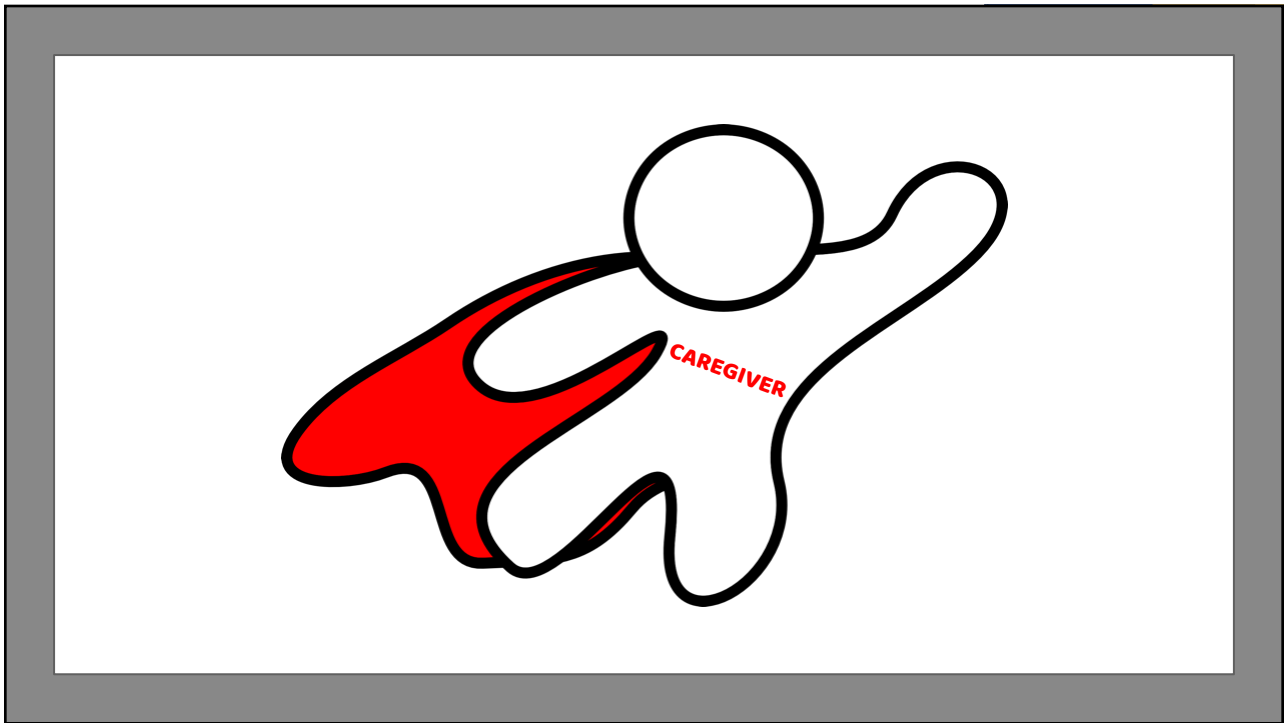
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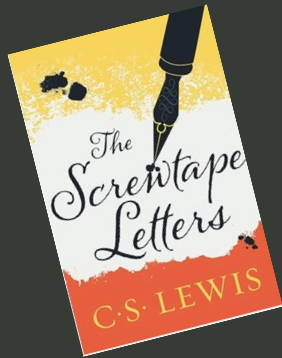


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The half twist



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The natural and healthy desire for caregiving can be used for good or evil!

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“Near enemies” or
“frenemies”-
It's what shame and
fear uses to take us
out of our best selves

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A far enemy: apathy
or disregard

A near enemy: using
caregiving to meet
our own needs in an
unchecked manner

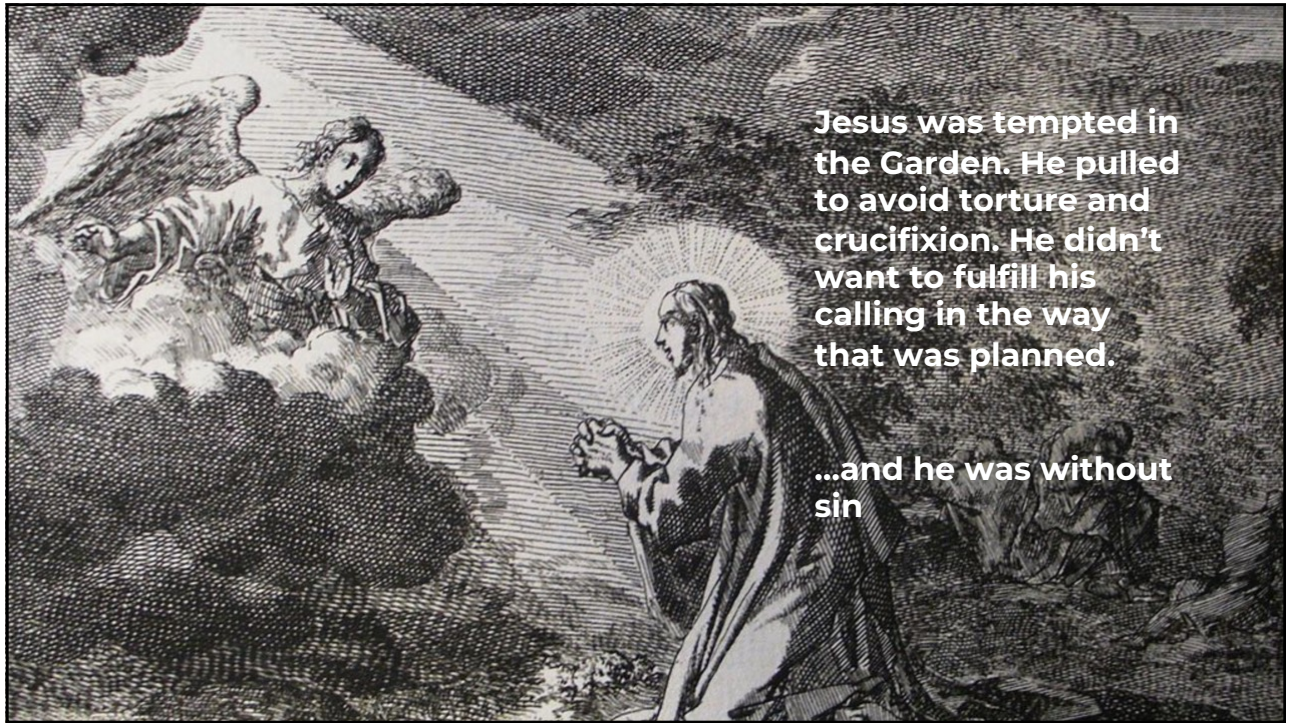
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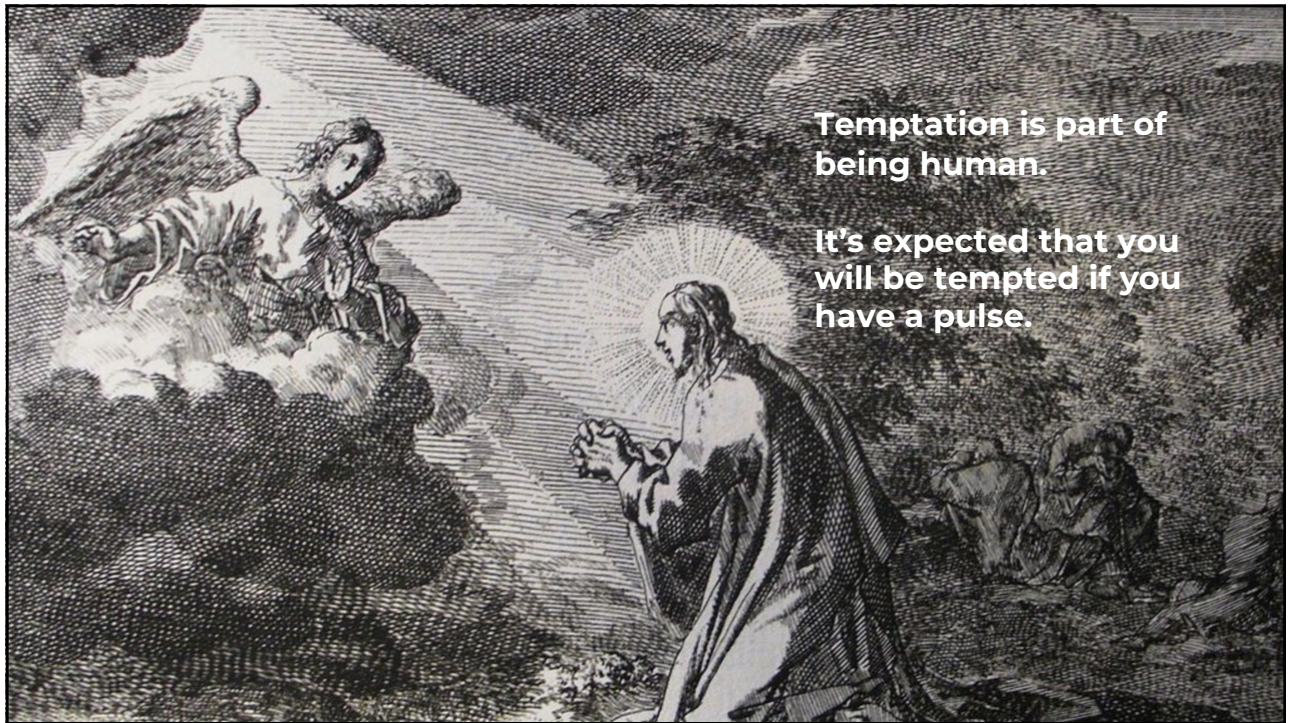
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Jesus was tempted in the Garden. He pulled to avoid torture and crucifixion. He didn't want to fulfill his calling in the way that was planned.

...and he was without sin

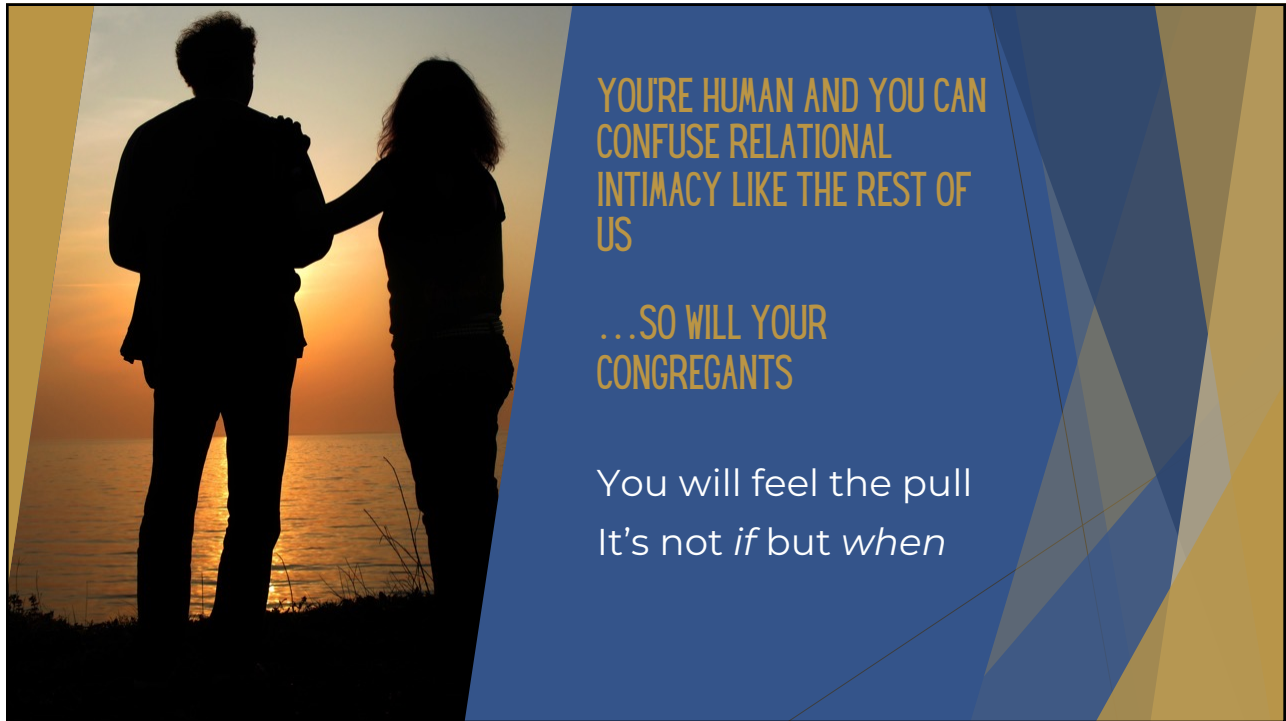
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Temptation is part of being human.

It's expected that you will be tempted if you have a pulse.

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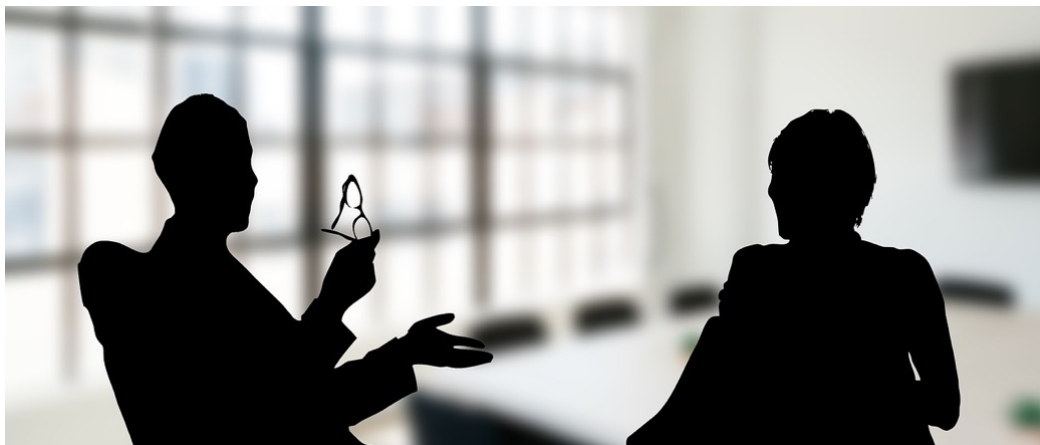


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Clinical Supervision for Therapists: What's the equivalent for pastors?

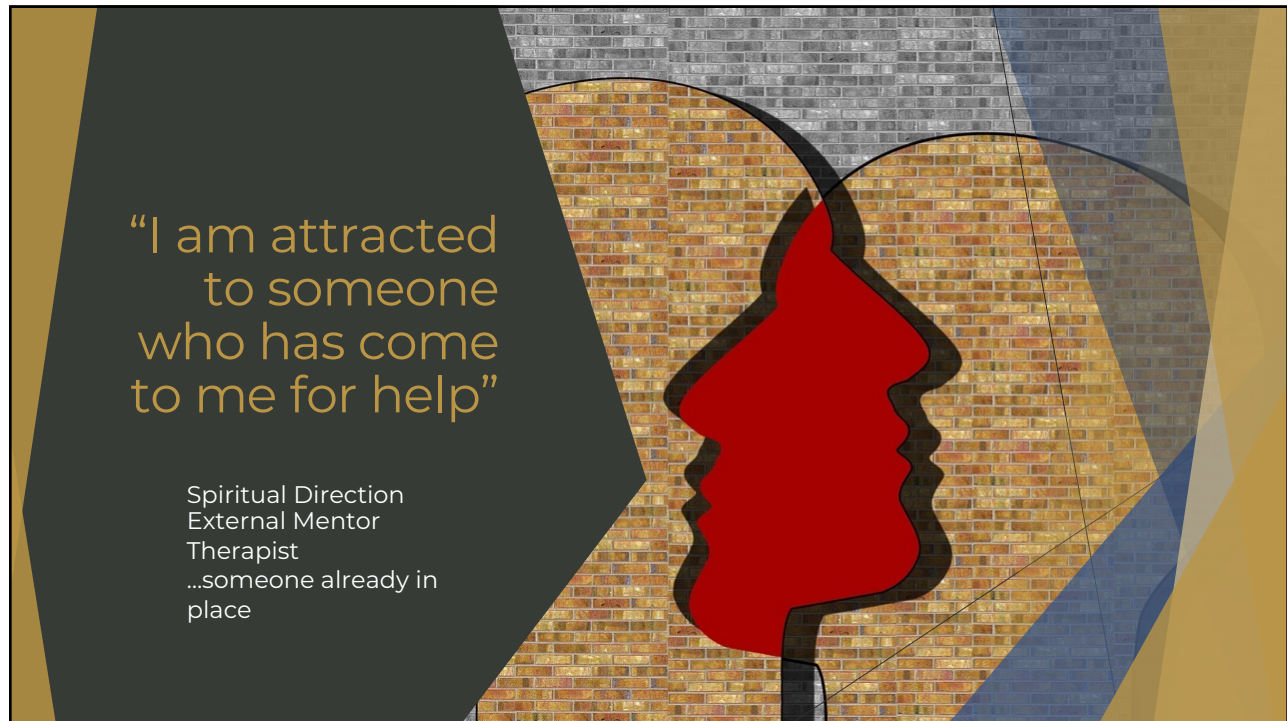


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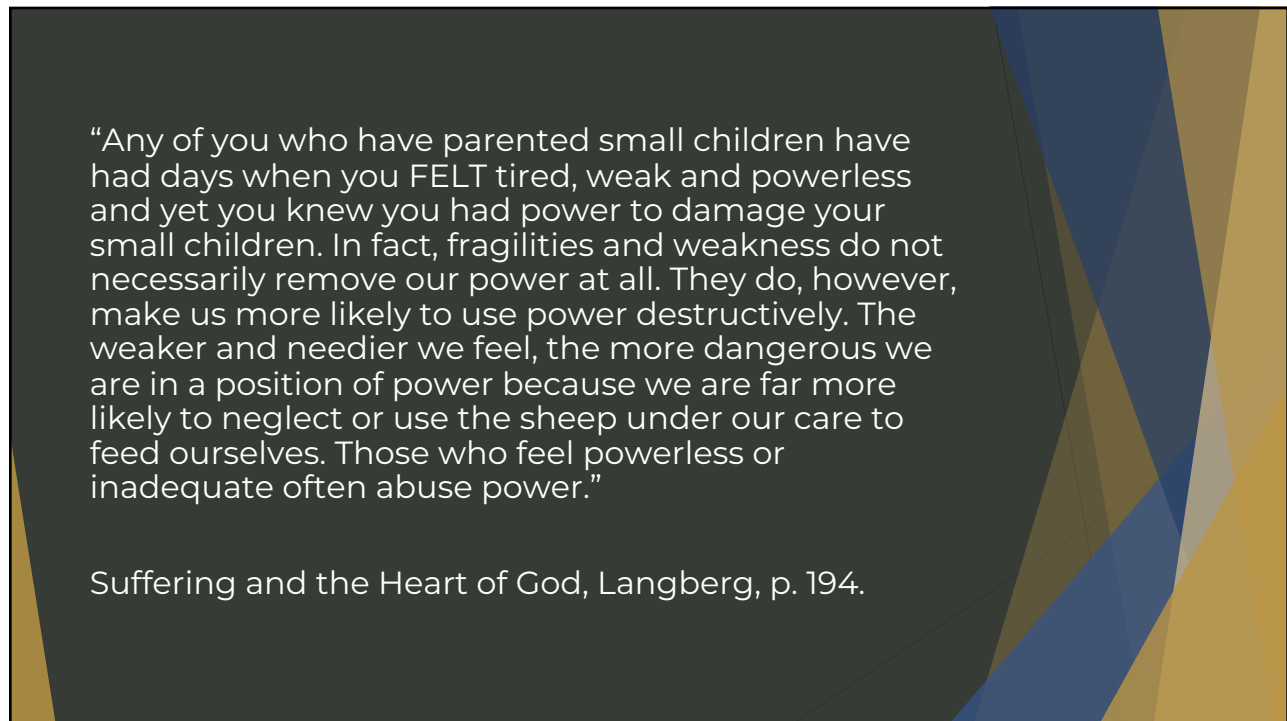
“I am attracted to someone who has come to me for help”

...requires a place for expression and passionate exploration

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MYTHS OF VULNERABILITY

1. Vulnerability is weakness
2. I can opt out of vulnerability
3. Vulnerability is oversharing
4. I can go it alone
5. You can engineer the uncertainty and discomfort out of vulnerability
6. Trust comes before vulnerability

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When expectations are placed on us—by self or others—we feel pressured and often anxious to meet those expectations. We fear we are inadequate. Our tendency to abuse power is greatly magnified during times of weariness, neediness, and anxiety.

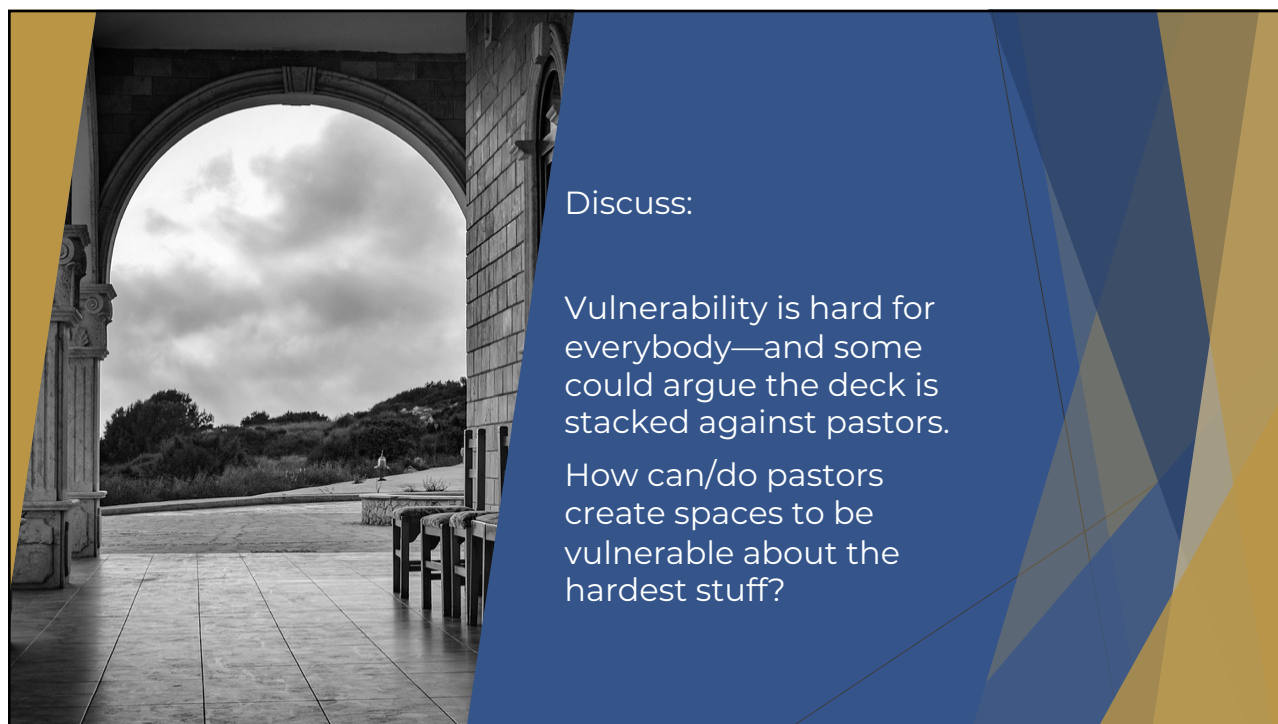
Diane Langberg

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Please share together?
Conversation...

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Discuss:

Vulnerability is hard for everybody—and some could argue the deck is stacked against pastors.

How can/do pastors create spaces to be vulnerable about the hardest stuff?

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3 COMPONENTS TO ABUSE OF POWER

- ▶ Self deception**
- ▶ Deception of others
- ▶ Coercion



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3 COMPONENTS TO ABUSE OF POWER

- ▶ Self deception**
- ▶ Deception of others
- ▶ Coercion



...who is going to notice and keep you grounded?

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...who is going to notice and keep you grounded?

Hint: It's not a colleague on staff, your supervisor or your spouse



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THE FROG IN THE KETTLE

You **will** be able to fool yourself in a sinister way if you aren't clearly grounded and have accountability

KEY QUESTION:
Whose needs am I meeting here?



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IT'S A SLOW FADE

When you give yourself away

It's a slow fade
When black and white have
turned to grey
And thoughts invade, choices
made

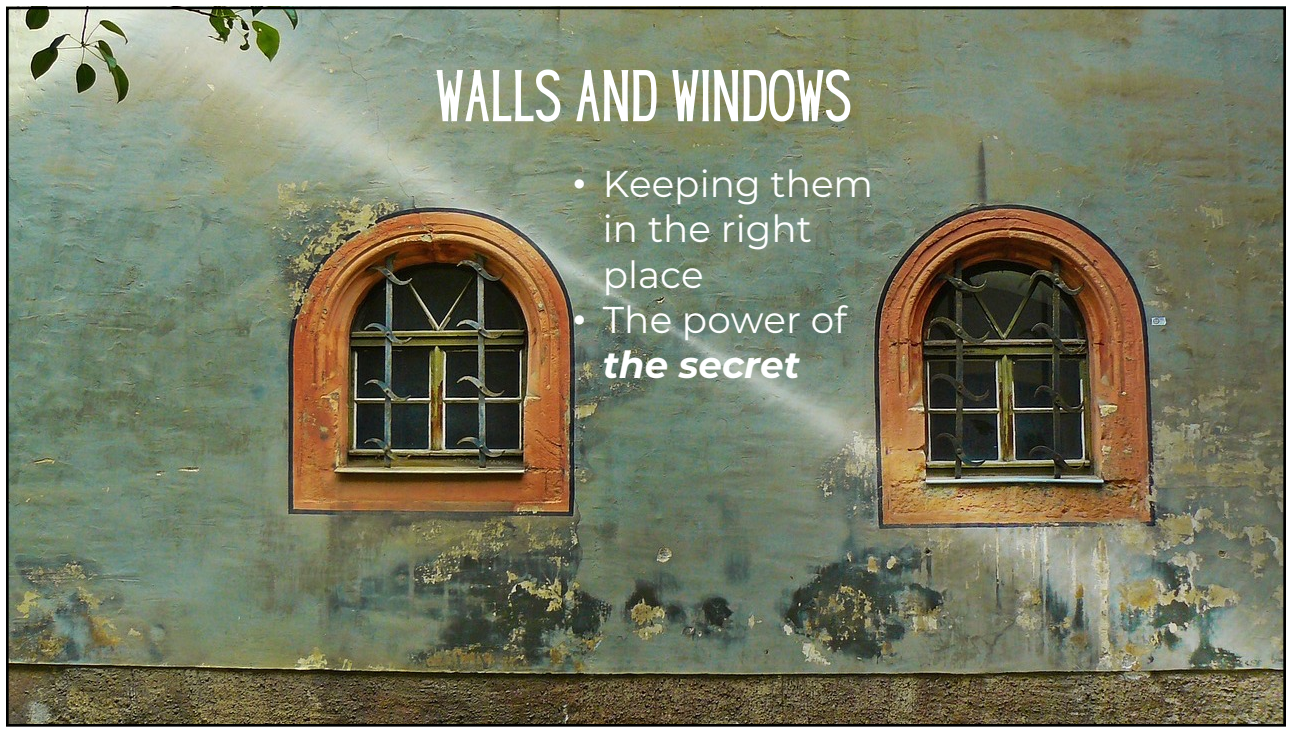
People never crumble in a day

...The journey from your mind
to your hands

Is shorter than you're thinking

Be careful if you think you
stand
You just might be sinking

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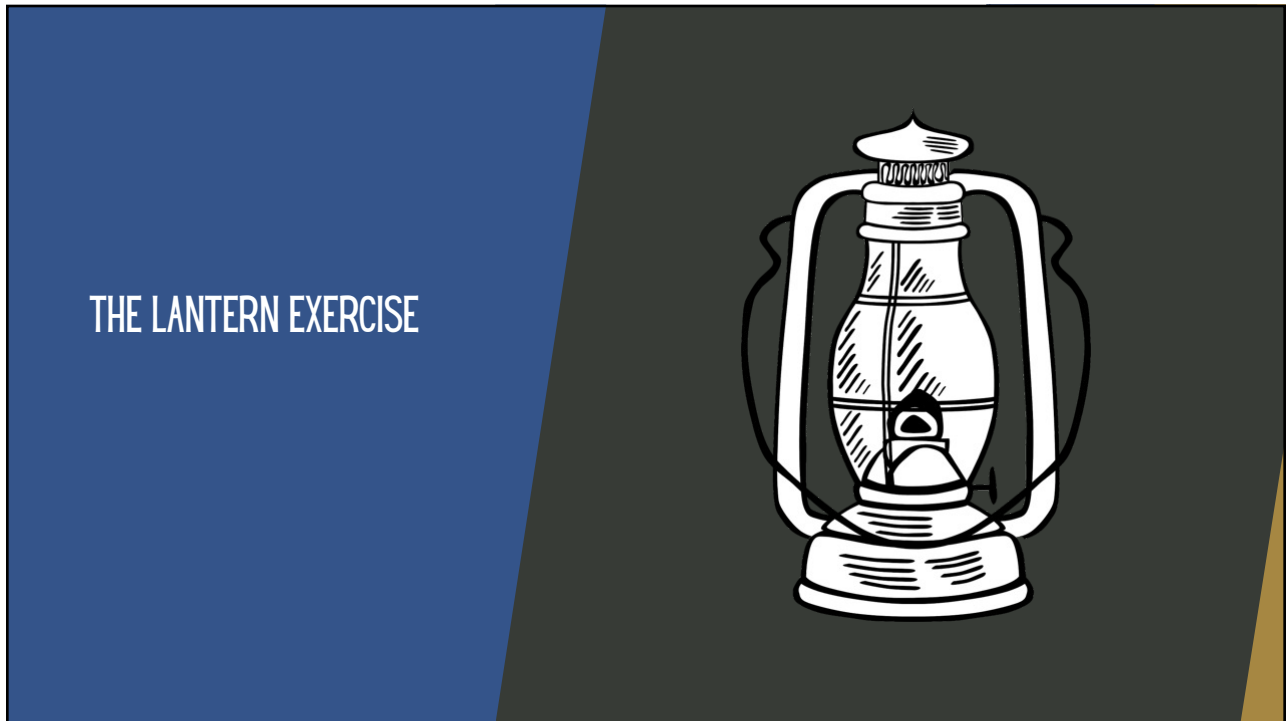
WALLS AND WINDOWS

- Keeping them in the right place
- The power of *the secret*

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THE LANTERN EXERCISE

- ▶ What purpose/value drives your life?



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THE LANTERN EXERCISE- THE FLAME

The core *knowing* is the flame that light the way—
your values

- ▶ Does this define me?
- ▶ Is this who I am at my best?
- ▶ Is this a filter that I use to make hard decisions?



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THE LANTERN EXERCISE- PROTECTING THE FLAME

All lanterns have devices
that protect the flame.

What are the specific
behaviors that support and
protect your values?

Who are the people you want
to put around you who
support and protect your
values?



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THE LANTERN EXERCISE- THE HANDLE:

Use the handle to identify
the behaviors that can
serve as a red flag that
you're walking away from
your light and your values.

- ▶ I know I'm in trouble when,
or I know I've lost my way
when:
- ▶ I know I'm out of alignment
with my values when:



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THE LANTERN EXERCISE- RADIATION LIGHT

When was a time you embodied your most important values?



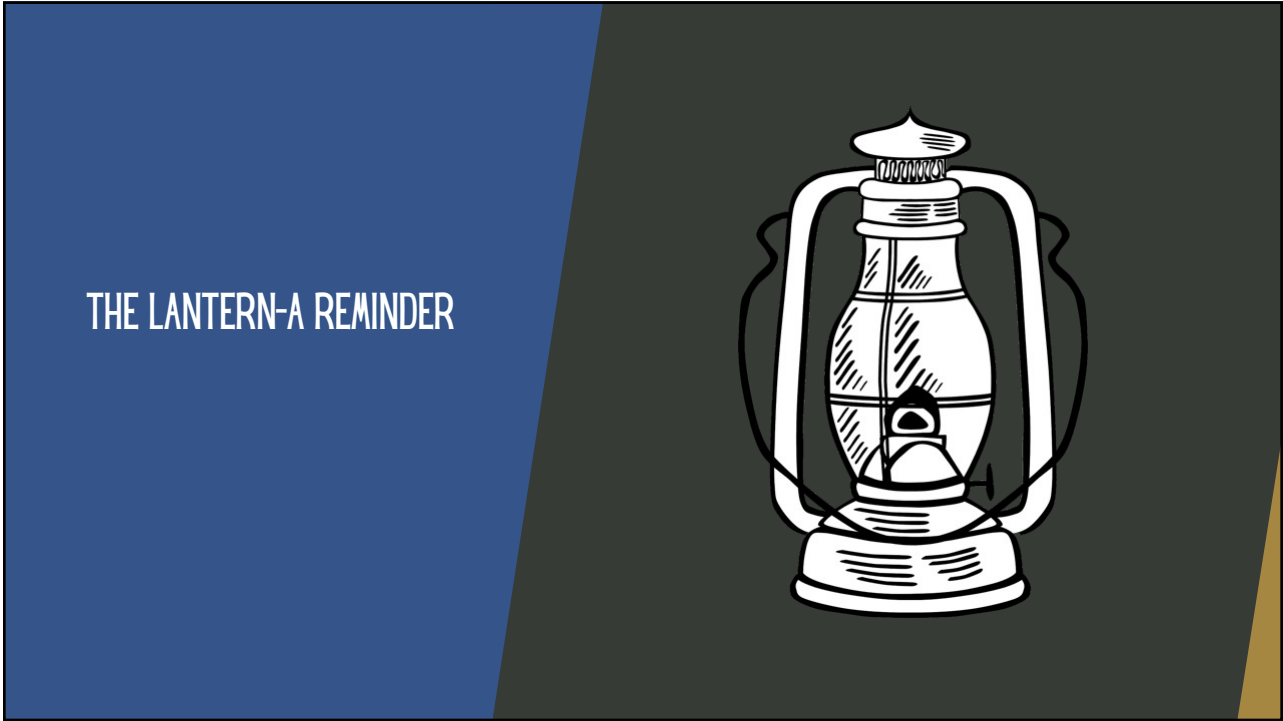
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What do you want to say to
future you in
that moment?

What do you want future, vulnerable you to remember?

What do you want future, fragile, struggling, tempted
you to do?


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The Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in the world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. God loves us, not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love

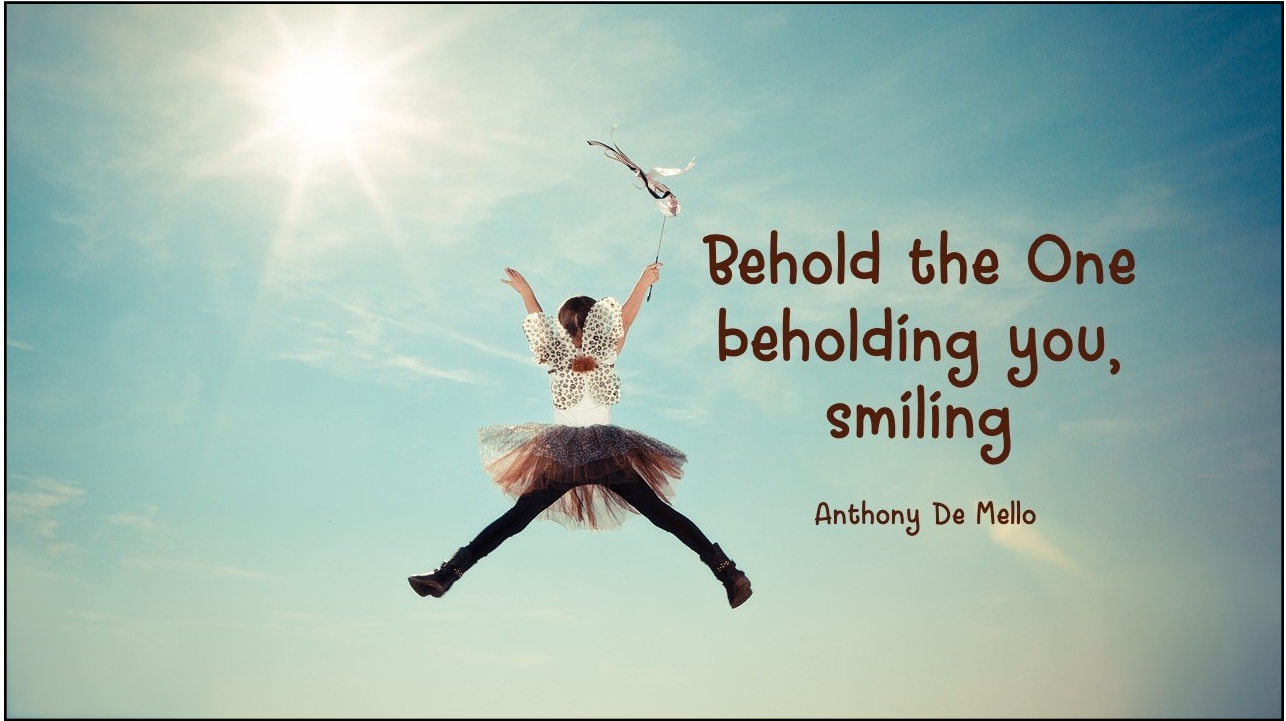
Henri Nouwen

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SO...HOW DO WE GET THERE?
HOW DO I GET THERE?

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Behold the One
beholding you,
smiling

Anthony De Mello