



RESILIENCE:

FINDING WHOLENESS IN MINISTRY
BY WAY OF THE CROSS

STUDY:

Wholeness by Way of the Cross

Small Group Participant's Workbook

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Grand Rapids
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Wholeness by Way of the Cross

OVERVIEW

The goal of this study is to help ministry leaders and students in ministry preparation programs recognize threats to their wholeness and build resilience when confronted by those threats.

RECOMMENDATION

Consider completing the *Self-Care in Ministry* and *Wholeness in Community* studies prior to beginning this study.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this study, participants will be able to

- + Identify threats to their wholeness
- + Evaluate their understanding of self-sacrifice and wholeness in light of Scripture
- + Reflect on portraits of wholeness

LESSONS

- + Suffering in Ministry
- + Self-Sacrifice in Ministry
- + Shame in Ministry
- + Trauma and Painful Circumstances in Ministry
- + Wholeness through Union with Christ
- + Wholeness through an Undivided Heart

MATERIALS NEEDED

- + Internet access for videos
- + Computer, projector, and/or speakers to show videos
- + Whiteboard, poster board, or large sticky notes
- + Dry erase or bold markers



Suffering in Ministry

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will reflect on your experiences of suffering and hardship in light of a theological perspective.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: JAMES 1:2-4

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Complete the following:

- + How often do you “consider it pure joy” when you experience suffering? (Circle one.)
Never Seldom Occasionally Often Always

- + Describe a time when you faced a trial in ministry that tested your faith.

- + In what ways did God use that trial to grow your faith or develop your perseverance?

- + What sorts of suffering have you experienced in the past few years? Make a list below.



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VIDEO

Watch the video, “The Role of Suffering in Ministry” in which Dr. Ingrid Faro describes three different types of suffering. Take notes as you watch the video.

Type of Suffering	Notes

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Revisit your list of the types of suffering you have experienced in the past year. Try to categorize them according to the three types of suffering Faro described in her video.



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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people. As a group, respond to the following questions:

- + What were the three types of suffering Dr. Faro described?
- + What was your initial reaction to the three categories she presented?
- + Which of the three types of suffering have you experienced in the past year? How has that suffering affected your ministry? Your wellbeing?
- + What are some strategies Dr. Faro offered for maintaining resilience in the face of suffering?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Respond to the following questions:

- + To whom can you go to process the suffering that you have experienced? Do you have a counselor, spiritual director, mentor, or trusted friend? If so, list their name(s) below.

- + What concerns you about sharing your suffering story and processing it with a trusted individual?

- + What could be the benefit(s) of sharing your suffering story and processing it with a trusted individual?



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PRACTICE

Meditate on John 16:33. Then, respond to the question that follows.

Jesus told his disciples, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

- + In what ways do Jesus’ words speak to you in your suffering?



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LEARNING LOG

Based on what you learned in this lesson, what action will you take? Make a plan. An example has been provided for you.

Example: This week I will make an appointment with my spiritual director to share some of my suffering story. After I share, I will listen with curiosity and without defensiveness to their response.



Self-Sacrifice in Ministry

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will consider the role of self-sacrifice in ministry and the effect of self-sacrifice on pastoral wellbeing.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: JOHN 10:18

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people. Share your responses to the following questions.

- + How would you define “self-sacrifice”?
- + In what ways do we tend to sacrifice ourselves in ministry?
- + What sorts of self-sacrifice are healthy?
- + When does self-sacrifice become unhealthy?
- + In the previous lesson, we learned about intentional suffering. What is the relationship between intentional suffering and self-sacrifice?



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VIDEO

Watch the video, “Self-Care and Self-Sacrifice in Ministry,” in which Dr. Matt Bloom shares about one question he has about the interplay between self-sacrifice and wellbeing.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Return to your small groups and discuss the video using the following questions.

- + In the video, Dr. Bloom describes what he believes to be a tipping point between self-sacrifice that enhances wellbeing and self-sacrifice that diminishes it. Have you experienced such a tipping point? If so, what do you think the tipping point is for you?
- + What events or circumstances seem to take you into unhealthy self-sacrifice?
- + Dr. Bloom also speculates that a person’s theological orientation or framework affects how they think about self-sacrifice. How do you respond to that idea?

SCRIPTURE STUDY

Complete the following Scripture study individually or as a group.

When we encounter Jesus in Matthew 14:13-21, he has just learned of John the Baptist’s beheading.

Read Matthew 14:13a. Close your eyes and try to visualize the scene.

- + What emotions do you think Jesus felt?
- + Why do you think “he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place” (Matthew 14:13a, NIV)?



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Read Matthew 13:13b-14.

- + How would you have felt upon seeing the crowd on the shore?
- + To what extent would your response have mirrored Jesus'?
- + How was he able to have compassion on them at that moment?

Read Matthew 14:15-21.

- + After a long day filled with grief, travel, and healing people, what did Jesus do?
- + How would you characterize the miracle that took place in this account?

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Share what you learned from the Scripture study by responding to the following questions as a large group.

- + In what ways do you relate to what Jesus experienced in this passage?
- + What could be the connection between this passage and the concepts of self-care and self-sacrifice?
- + How might the miracle in this account be a source of encouragement for pastors on the verge of unhealthy self-sacrifice?



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PRACTICE

Read John 10:1-18. Then, meditate on verse 18.

“No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:18, NIV).

- + Dr. Faro referenced this verse when describing intentional suffering. What might Jesus be saying to you about intentional suffering and self-sacrifice in this verse?



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LEARNING LOG

Answer the following questions to reflect on and apply what you learned in this lesson.

- + In what ways are you tempted toward unhealthy self-sacrifice?
- + What or who could help you develop and maintain good boundaries around self-sacrifice?
- + What is your major takeaway from this lesson?
- + What action or attitude might God be calling you to take based on what you have learned?



Shame in Ministry

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn about shame and the ways it can manifest in ministry.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: JOHN 3:16-21

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people.

How would you define shame? As a small group, create a definition of shame. Write it on a poster or large sticky note. You will share your definition with the large group.

Shame is _____
_____.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Each group will share its definition of shame. Compare and contrast the definitions. Then, respond to the following questions. You may want to list the responses on a whiteboard or poster.

- + What sort of situations or experiences cause people to feel shame?
- + What sort of situations or experiences cause pastors to feel shame?



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VIDEO

In the video, “Defining Shame,” Dr. Chuck DeGroat defines shame and describes how it manifests in the hearts and minds of pastors. As you watch this video, listen for key words or phrases that resonate with you. Note them in the space below.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Return to your small groups. Discuss the video using the following questions.

- + In what ways did Dr. DeGroat’s description of shame resonate with you?
- + What are some of the questions or doubts that lie below the waterline in your heart and mind?
- + In what ways could shame be affecting your relationships and your ministry?
- + What do you think are some pathways out of shame?

PRACTICE

Read John 3:16-21. Then, meditate on the following verses 19-21. Finally, respond to the question below.

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God” (John 3:19-21, NIV).

- + In what ways might Jesus’ words be an invitation out of shame?



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INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

This week, as you go about your work, pay attention to feelings of shame. List the situations or experiences in which you feel shame and try to note the questions or doubts resounding in your mind.

Situation/Experience	Questions/Doubts

- + Review your list. What patterns or themes do you notice?
- + Revisit the words and phrases that resonated with you during Dr. DeGroat's video. Do you discern an invitation from God in the words or phrases? If so, what could it be?



Trauma and Painful Circumstances in Ministry

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn how trauma and painful circumstances can affect wellbeing.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: 2 CORINTHIANS 4

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

NOTE: Ask the participants to respond to the following questions. For the second question, you may wish to divide students into small groups for a brief Scripture study in preparation for responding.

- + Based on what you know of Paul's ministry, what sorts of challenges did he and his colleagues face?
- + What events and circumstances threatened their wellbeing? (Hint: Consider Acts 16:16-40, 17:1-9, 21:1-16, 22:30-11, 27:27-44, and 28:17-31.)
- + What are some threats to ministers' wellbeing today?



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VIDEO

In the video, “Resilience in the Midst of Painful Circumstances” Dr. Danjuma Gibson reflects on what he learned from Frederick Douglass’s life about how trauma and painful circumstances can affect a person’s wellbeing.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Discuss the video using the following questions.

- + Dr. Gibson believes that an individual can have a high level of faith and yet still experience trauma and painful circumstances. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- + To what extent have you ever denied your mental or emotional anguish in order to appear strong to others? What were the benefits? What were the costs?
- + In what ways can ignoring your trauma and pain impact your wellbeing? Your ministry?

SCRIPTURE STUDY

Complete this Scripture study individually or in small groups.

Read 2 Corinthians 4 and answer the following questions.

- + In what ways do Paul’s words connect with the concept of trauma and painful circumstances in ministry?

- + In what ways did Paul and his companions rely on their faith in the midst of trauma and painful circumstances?



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- + How would you rewrite 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 to align with the pain and trauma you have experienced?

- + Under what circumstances are you tempted to “lose heart” (v. 16)?

- + What gives you hope in the midst of pain and trauma?



Wholeness through Union with Christ

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn about drawing strength for ministry through your union with Christ.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: EPHESIANS 3:16-19

DISCUSSION IN PAIRS

Turn to a neighbor. Share your responses to the following questions.

- + How would you define wholeness?
- + What do you think it means to find wholeness by way of the cross?

VIDEO

In the video, “Union with Christ,” Pastor Karen Ingebretson and Dr. Chuck DeGroat describe how their union with Christ helps them pursue wholeness in ministry.



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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Then, discuss the video by responding to the questions below.

- + What resonated most with you as you watched the video?
- + In what ways did the speakers relate wholeness to union with Christ?
- + Thomas Oden describes the believer's union with Christ this way: "Christ himself dwells in the justified soul born of God. The Son is present by the power of the Spirit, making known the love of the Father."¹ In what ways does "knowing the love of the Father" help us amidst the suffering, shame, and trauma we experience?

¹ Oden, T. C. (1992). *Life in the Spirit: Systematic theology volume three*. San Francisco: Harper, p. 207.



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LEARNING LOG

- + Union with Christ is a spiritual reality for the believer. Yet we can struggle to know this reality experientially. Why do you think that is?

- + What gets in the way of your experiencing union with Christ?

- + What can we do to cultivate a sense of our union of Christ?

- + Brother Lawrence once wrote, “We cannot avoid the dangers of life without God’s continual help, so we should ask Him for it ceaselessly. But how can we ask for help unless we are with Him? To be with Him, we must cultivate the holy habit of thinking of Him often.”² What practices help you think of God often?

² Brother Lawrence. (1982). *The practice of the presence of God*. New Kensington: Whitaker House, p. 49.



Wholeness through an Undivided Heart

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn how having an undivided heart can be a pathway to wholeness.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PSALM 86:11-12

VIDEO

In the video, “An Undivided Heart,” Pastor Mark Shaw reflects on his understanding of wholeness in ministry.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into groups of 3-4 people. Discuss the video using the following questions.

- + What does it mean to have “an undivided heart”?
- + In the video, Pastor Mark Shaw comments that a divided heart can lead to great peril in ministry. What do you think he meant by that?
- + Can you give of an example of someone whose ministry suffered as a result of having a divided heart?
- + Pastor Mark Shaw describes wholeness as living with the whole of his inner life before God. What does that mean?
- + How does Pastor Mark Shaw differentiate his work and his ministry?



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- + What does it look like to have an undivided heart in one's life, ministry, and work?
- + What are the obstacles or challenges to maintaining appropriate boundaries yet living with an undivided heart in all of one's spheres of influence?

PRACTICE

Practice *Lectio Divina*, a form of spiritual reading, using Psalm 139. You can complete this practice as a group or individually.

- + Listen as Psalm 139 is read aloud. Pay attention for a word or phrase that resonates with you.
- + Listen as Psalm 139 is read again. Notice how your word or phrase fits within the psalm. Seek the truth or challenge God has for you.
- + Listen as Psalm 139 is read a third time. Turn the psalmist's prayer into your prayer. Respond to the truth or challenge he has for you in this passage.

